What does it mean to be Free?

II Corinthians 3:1-6; 12-18
Rev. John M. Buchanan
January 19, 1969

What does it mean to be free? There is no more important question than that today, or in any age; and the answer depends entirely on who it is who is doing the answering.

A young Marxist might say that to be free means to be rid of capitalism and the whole free-enterprise system. An African might define freedom in terms of the absence of the white man's presence, his institutions and his money. The American ghetto dweller might talk about freedom from the police or slum lords. The middle class merchant might define it as freedom to make a profit: a real estate man - to sell or not to sell to whom he pleases. Certainly the Trustees of Purdue University and the Purdue Peace Union differ when it comes to articulating what it means to be free. So would a plant manager and union steward. So would we all because to this question , as to all others, each of us brings his own personal freight, vested interests, commitments and operating assumptions.

And yet, you and I, ought to be able to express some fundamental unanimity, no matter who we are, or what our vested interests happen to be. Because you and I have voluntarily chosen to place ourselves under the discipline of discipleship to Jesus Christ, and that discipleship may, in fact, be understood almost entirely in terms of freedom.

The question of what it means to be free might be merely philosophical, just an entertaining round of intellectual gymnastics, except for the fact that it is being asked today by all sorts of people and groups of people. The Black Power advocate as well as the member of the John Birch Society; the student revolutionary and young republican: the devout Christian who throws over the Church and his brother who stays in the church - all are asking - "What does it really mean to be free?"

The disturbing thing is that we don't really seem to know, and that fact makes the quest doubly important. We are inclined sometimes to look down our social noses at those involved in the quest. Too often we dismiss an individual and the question he is asking because of his attire, or his beard or the length of his hair. And to the degree we do this, we exhibit our own lack of freedom - our own captivity to certain styles and forms. The quest is on - and we need to be part of it.

What does it mean to be free? One thing it doesn't mean is the complete absence of responsibility in the form of basic rules and regulations. It does not mean to do whatever you feel like doing whenever you feel like doing it. Absolute, philosophic freedom is called anarchy - which in fact has proven to be synonymous with chaos.

It is interesting that there are those who seriously propose this as a working definition of freedom. To effectively espouse their cause, they have an international organization of anarchists, which of course can have no rules or regulations. They met last year in Rome and spent three days arguing and fighting among themselves about who would be the leader. Anarchy just doesn't work. The assumption that men live in some predictable relationship with each other rules out totally any form of absolute freedom. Walter Lippman said it well in his little book, Preface to Morals - "We have come to see that Huxley was right when he said that a man's worst difficultires begin when he is able to do as he likes."

That, very briefly, is theNew Testament on Freedom. And from that point we can begin to answer, from a Christian vantage, the question "What does it mean to be free?"

I would begin with the church itself. When I say the Church, I mean, of course, the universal Christian Church in all its expressions. But let us not be guilty of excluding from that mystical universal body the Church as we know it best - here in the life of this congregation. If the gospel is a word of freedom, then the church ought to be supremely the one institution in society where men are free. Collectively free - the Church itself ought to be free withinsociety to be itself. But it is not, and if you think it is, you're not thinking very well.

On the contrary, the Church has allowed itself to become captive to the culture in which it find itself: that culture being overwhelmingly white and middle class. In his excellent book the Suburban Captivity of the Churches, Gibson Winter discusses the exodus of main-line Protestantism from the Ghettoes, and then issues a very ominous warning. The Church in North Africa, he points out, lived for several hundred years. And then it disappeared without a trace. "This collapse can certainly be attributed in part to the expansion of Islam; however, the core of the problem was the identification of North African Christianity with the upper social classes. The Churches became centers of upper-class culture; consequently they lacked widespread support among the people. When Islam swept across North Africa it erased Christianity. Where Christianity has become identified with upper class elites, it has lacked a substantial base in the working population and has been unable to weather social change." (p.50)

It happened a thousand year ago, because Christianity in the Church was captive to one class. It happened in Cuba, and today is heppening all over Latin America. The Church is so completely identified with and dependent upon the wealthy land-owning class that it has become almost totally estranged from the great mass of people.

Can it happen here? I would suggest that it already has. The Church is not free to be itself - consequently it has very little to say to anyone but white, middle class people. The ghettoes just aren't listening any more.

Where, for instance, did we ever get the idea that the success of a church could be measured in terms of its statistical and financial size? We got the idea, of course, from American middle class culture, which puts a great premium on statistical and financial strength. That cultural value - has become an ecclesiastical goal, and to the degree the Church reaches for it, it is just as much a captive as it would be if the government forcibly closed all its doors.

In Jesus Christ the church is free. It is free to be the kind of institution he called it to be - loving, serving, helping, healing. It doesn't have to worry about survival - God will take care of that. It has to worry only about being what Christ called it to be. If only we could understand that about ourselves: if only we could see that we are called together not to be successful - but to be faithful - if only we could exercise the freedom God gives us.

What does it mean to be free? We began with that question, and now I would pose it personally. What does it (or could it) mean to you and me to be free?

You know, I think somewhere in the back of our minds we know, or at least we have some image - some hint. I think our over-reaction to the

What Ever Happened to Authority
Mark 1:14-22
January 26, 1969

It seems that we are spending more and more time recently reminiscing about the "good old days". And the topic of these nostalgic reminiscences seems always to have something to do with authority. As we look back - even to the recent past - we recall a feeling of safety, security and stability. Authority was respected. Children obeyed their parents; students obeyed their teachers; the people respected the police and the courts; the world respected America; and everybody respected the church.

Of course, there is a certain favorable distortion that takes place whenever we engage in this kind of reminiscence. Things were never quite that simple. And yet there can be no denying that we are, today, in a new situation, and that authority is, in fact, under siege from several quarters. Now before we look more deeply let me hasten to add that this siege of authority may not be nearly so ominous as it appears. The radical right would have us equate the questioning of authority with the death throes of the Republic. I would merely suggest at this point that quite the reverse may be true; that it is a healthy, albeit painful, exercise for authority to be questioned with the result that true authority is finally established and false authority unceremoniously thrown to the wind.

In any case, this is where we are. At no time in our history has constituted civil authority in the form of government, law enforcement agencies and the judicial structure been less sure of itself, less effective, or commanded less respect. In the cities, on the campuses, authority has yet to be established notwithstanding modern weaponry, National Guard invasions, police dogs and the strong talk of Governor Reagan. It just hasn't worked. In fact, it appears that efforts in this direction serve only to increase the ever-widening gap between those who exercise authority and those who question the right to its legitimate exercise.

Parents, since the days of Socrates, have bemoaned the disrespect of children toward authority. In this sense the generation gap is rather old-hat. And yet, here too, we are dealing with something new. This is different. The old gap has noticeably widened. And, in fact, parental authority is not what it used to be.

Probably the most significant illustration of the authority crisis in which we find ourselves, however, has to do with the church. For a thousand years the Roman Catholic Church has been synonomous with authority. The Church had and exercised a commonly accepted authority over the lives, beliefs and behavior of its members. In relationship to the world about it, the church claimed for itself a certain divinely ordained authority to act, to influence and to wield power. That, too, has passed. The liberal Protestant journal "The Christian Century" several months ago was strongly critical of Pope Paul's encyclical on birth control, taking it to task for its lack of realism and its failure to speak to the needs of people and at the same time the most important single problem facing the whole world. But in the very next issue, "The Century" called attention to the fact that thereally significant thing about the Encyclical was that priests were openly criticizing it, and Roman Catholics were openly and consciously ignoring it. That is to say, ecclesiastical authority simply isn't what it used to be. And the Christian Century was quick to see that all churchly authority is at the same impasse. That is, it's crumbling fast. What there was of the old authority, is no more, and some

authority of Jesus was contrasted.

Of course we read back into the New Testament our own beliefs and feelings about Jesus. To see - twenty centuries later - He is the divine Son of God. For us that is the base of his authority: He is Lord of all: He had all the truth of God on His side. But His first century listeners certainly didn't know that or belitve it. To them he was just an itinerant teacher from the city of Nazareth.

To understand the full significance of this remarkable contrast, then, we must note that he had no religious credentials: the scribes did. He had no ecclesiastical status: the scribes did. He had no power of influence with the establishment: the scribes did. And yet he had authority; and the scribes did not.

Why?

Jesus spoke from experience: that's why. The scribes based their teaching and judgements on tradition. Jesus spoke out of the context of life itself. When He taught He told stories people could understand; situations in which his listeners had been involved. He posed questions they had asked and gave answers that were realistic. That is to say Jesus, was relevant: His teachings met people where they were because they were coming from one who knew what life was like for the common man. Jesus had this authority. But there was more.

It was an authority of love: deep, compassionate, personal concern for people. They knew his reputation. He had defied tradition by stooping to lift a prostitute from the gutter: He had compassion for the adultress, the leper, the tax collector, the riff raff. The scribes did not. Or if they did, their fellings were well desguised in the costume of respectable peity. So he had authority: when He talked about a man's social responsibility for his neighbor the people knew exactly what he meant because he was living it daily. To use the cliche, "he practiced what He preached" and so He had authority.

Finally, there was an authenticity about Him when He spoke. There was nothing pompous or presumptious here. People responded because this was a genuine man. George Arther Buttrick has put it well: "People listened to Jesus, and then said, That is what I have always known deep down, even though I have no words to say it" (I.B. P336, Vol. VII) That's a perceptive comment. Every so often it happens to me. Someone will put into words a feeling, an understanding, that is inside me, but which I've never been able to articulate. And when that happens, the person who makes it happen suddenly has authority for me.

There is more, of course, Jesus had that quality so much in the news at election time called charisma. He spoke - and a spark was kindled: people listened. You can't put it down - but some men have it, and others do not. But mainly His authority was based on his life experience, His love and His honest authenticity. And it was for this that people were astonished.

Now, it seems to me that this little exercise ought to be helping us with our own concerns about authority. It seems to me that we ought to learn here that parental authority based on either coercion or tradition isn't going to be very effective. To put it even more bluntly, if we expect children to respect our authority 1)because we will punish them if they don't, or 2)because we are parents and children ought to obey parents - are in for a rude awakening. It doesn't work - at least for long.

And yet that is an extremely difficult lesson to learn. We wish it were the other way. It would be so much simpler if our homes could operate on the same basis as Marine "Boot Camp". But the homes in which I've observed real authority - effective authority - are the homes in which love is so genuine anyone can feel it; when parents honestly attempt to participate in the thought -worlds of their children: where judicial decisions are not handed down ceremoniously, but gently, in love, and out of a mutual participation in

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From Water to Wine
John 2:1-11
February 2, 1969
John M. Buchanan

Of all the situations in which Jesus is portrayed by the Gospel writers, the wedding at Cana is perhaps the most provocative - and one of the most unlikely. Of all the miracles, or mighty deeds, related in the New Testament, this transformation of water into wine is, by far, the strangest and the most difficult for the moder reader.

Everybody has problems with this one. At a base level very few of us are totally comfortable with this whole matter of the "miraculous" in the New Testament. It doesn't correspond with our experience or our understanding of the laws of nature. And yet most of us are sensitive enough to see that it makes no more sense to categorically deny that the miracles happened than it does to blindly and unthinkingly accept them as recorded. We have come to a kind of modus vivendi with the healing mircles. These we can fit into our patterns of thinking, and if we don't understand at least we have a "feel" for their significance. Not so here. This is different - in a fundamental way. This - to use Time Magazine's favorite cliche, "boggles the mind."

One of the ordinary ways of discussing the miracles is to focus on their significance. In a matter of healing, for instance, it is not too difficult to relate the miracle to Jesus' compassion and concern; his reconciling work among men. But you can't use this method here. The only person helped in this instance was the host who apparently hadn't prepared for this many guests. The only affliction relieved was his anxiety and embarrassment at running out of wine. All in all - a relatively trivial matter for God Incarnate to concern himself with.

And if you think we logical Presbyterians have difficulty here, imagine what it must be like for the good ladies of the W. C. T. U. People don't celebrate a wedding by quaffing great quantities of unfermented grape juice. They drank wine - and they drank wine because it added gaity and zest to the occasion. When they ran out Jesus didn't just provide another sip for the celebrants - he provided somewhere between 120 and 180 gallons. That's a lot of wine - and it's all a bit much for the W. C. T. U.

We all have problems with this incident and so we are inclined to ignore it, to pretend it isn't there - which is precisely what I've done in my ministry until now.

Now, let's take another and deeper look. The wedding involved a family which apparently was on intimate terms with the family of our Lord. They were invited guests, but beyond that, Mary seems to have been acquainted with the servants and they with her. When she gave an order, they listened. Wedding celebrations of the day were quite extensive, sometimes lasting as long as a week. The fact that the wine ran out shortly after Jesus and his party arrived indicates that the celebration must have been several days old. When the wine was gone, Mary instructed the servants to fill six stone jars, actually large crocks used by good Jews for ceremonial washing, with water. This done, they took a sample to the steward - who was a kindof Maitre de and Toastmaster. By the time he tasted it - it was wine, - good wine. The custom was to serve the best wine first - and the fact that this was better than any drunk this far was a matter of some surprise to the steward. He commented on this fact and the Gospel writer concludes the account with the observation: "This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana of Galilee, and manifested his glory: and his disciples believed in him."

Some scholars make much out of the fact that the account does not actually say that Jesus turned the water into wine - only that the water becam e wine. An interesting observation, the significance of which eludes me.

a "worldly" Christ, that is; a man without the neurotic dichotomy between the holy and the secular that characterizes other "religious" men. I think the story is significant because it portrays an immensely appealing Christ who went out of his way to share in the great joy of one of his friends.

How often have you done likewise? We well understand Jesus Christ as "the man of sorrows". All of us have experienced the comfort in a time of grief that comes from knowing our Lord knows our predicament and shares it with us. Most of us, moved by this authentic comfort, have tried, in some way, to communicate it to and share it with someone else. But how about when a friend experiences great joy? Is there anything about our faith that has to do with this?

I think there is: and I think we don't know much about it. Historically we Christians have always felt a little guilty about having a good time. The Church, down through the years, has allowed the power of God to operate within it in times of adversity: but in good times we are inclined to feel we must be doing something wrong. And so we come across to the world as a pompous institution, staid, boring, morose: and our worship experience, which initially was a celebration of the Resurrection, has become an ordeal to be endured.

This runs deeply in the collective Christian conscience, and I firmly believe we miss the relevance of the Gospel when we get caught in it.

Our Lord was one who knew the beauty of human joy. He was one who knew the importance of sharing - not only the low points, the dark valleys of human experience - but also the mountain-tops. And so he went to a wedding feast, and he celebrated. That ought to tell us - too - that he shares our sorrows and disappointments - but also our victories; that laughter is as blessed as tears: that the good times of life are full of the very grace of God.

Second, and not unrelated to the first meaning - is the fact that the celebration he graced was a wedding. I believe the presence of Jesus Christ at the wedding feast in Cana is significant for an understanding of marriage. The event is invoked in every Christian wedding. We remember that his ministry began at such an event. We remember that marriage is a religious covenant, not just a legal contract, and that Jesus Christ is present even in the most intimate relationships between a man and a woman.

Third, and perhaps tmost important, this incident means that the work Jesus Christ came to do among men can be understood primarily as "transformation". At the wedding the old wine was gone, and Jesus transformed water into something even better than the old. Whether or not the author intended it, this is exactly what he did with the religion of Judaism. On one occasion he even referred to the religion of the Pharisees as old wine - and suggested that the container - the skin - would break if the new wine of the Gospel were poured in.

The affect of Jesus Christ, for those who followed him, was transforming. He changed their institutions: in the place of the dead letter of the law he gave them the grace of living in freedom and responsibility. And out of the old Israel came the new. To those who believed he gave new life - new lives; to broken man, immoral men, poor men, hated men - he gave new life.

We don't know much about the "transforming" Lord. You and I have the

The Problem of Religion
John 2:12-22
February 9, 1969

Bethany Presbyterian Church
John M. Buchanan, Minister

Whether we like it or not, the fact remains that a great deal of the content of the New Testament has to do with conflict. Because we don't like it - conflict in general, and conflict in the church specifically - we condition ourselves to ignore it, cover it up, hide it; furiously trying to convince ourselves that all things religious must be serene and peaceful. We do so, of course, only at the risk of fundamentally altering the New Testament - a project we are willing to undertake for the grand cause of avoiding conflict.

Whether we like it or not, the conflict that runs through the Gospel narrative, is largely between Jesus and religion; that is, institutional religion in the form of the established power structure of first century Judaism. What is worse, Jesus, himself precipitated the conflict. The Pharisees and Sadducees didn't go to him looking for trouble. Quite the reverse is true. He brought it to them: he was the aggressor: he threw down the kind of arrogant ultimatum they could not ignore.

The incident itself is very familiar. In Matthew, Mark and Luke it occurs during the last week of his life, just prior to his arrest and crucifixion. In John - the account read this morning - the incident is at the beginning of his public ministry. Jesus went to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration, and when he arrived at the Temple he discovered a very bizarre scene. The outer court was filled with the clamour of the market place. Money changers competed with hawkers of sacrificial birds. Bulls, lambs, pigeons were for sale. His response was immediate. Fashioning a whip from some cords, he forcefully, violently ejected the entrepeneurs from their place of business, overturning their tables in the process. We can only imagine the chaos; animals running loose, salesmen scurrying after their stock and rolling coins; we can only imagine the initial surprise which must immediately have become resentment and their hatred.

That is the incident I would like to have us think about this morning. And while the rough details are still in your mind, and before we look at it more closely, I would direct your attention back to the present tense - our situation: the problem of religion today.

One part of the problem is that we are nearing the saturation point. In his excellent study, "The New Shape of American Religion", Martin Marty documents the fantastic rise in religious interest in this nation since World War II. The evidence is all about us. We can't even get the Cotton Bowl game underway without a public tip of the hat in the direction of heaven. People who would never think of reading the Bible to their children, or setting a foot inside the Church, raise their voices in pious protest because the Supreme Court has said that the states can't sponsor Bible reading and prayer as part of public education.

There is a continuing interest in religion in our culture. It seems that about half of thepersonalities on the Joe Pyne Show are in some way related to religion. As a topic of discussion, religion is a tried and true method of captivating an audience.

Religion continues to be very acceptable. The plaque in the Narthex symbolizing the Barmen Confession is testimony to the fact that in the not-too-distant-past, Chritian faith was not at all acceptable to the political power structure in one culture, at least. But in America, besides being a father and a veteran, a prospective politician can do no better for himself than salt his oratory with Biblical quotes.

Now let's return to the New Testament. As I mentioned before, the author of the fourth Gospel placed the incident of the cleansing of the Temple at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. The other three Gospels place it at the end. It is apparent, then, that the Gospel of John, written perhaps seventy years after the fact, uses this event to preface the story of Jesus Christ. This sets the stage. This conflict-situation introduces what is to follow. The reader is warned, here, to look for the conflict as it keeps emerging throughout the story.

Historians have shed some very helpful light on what was going on that day at the Temple. (The following information from Wm. Barclay, The Mind of Jesus, Ch. 19, p. 187-192)

Every adult, male Jew had to pay an annual Temple tax of half a shekel. To put that into perspective, it amounted to almost two days' wages. The tax could be paid at certain times and places, but one month before the Passover it could be paid only at the Temple itself.

When he came to the Temple to pay his half-shekel, he found a series of courts. The first was the Court of the Gentiles into which men of all nations were welcome. It was here that booths were set up to collect the tax. But the tax could be paid only in a certain type of coin--one with no image. And so there were other booths at which m oney changers exchanged whatever currency the person had into the appropriate coins. For this service, the money changers were paid a fee. Part of the job, also, was to decide the legitimate value of the coins they were exchanging; and many an argument transpired over the silver scales--which were the tools of their trade.

Now in all probability a man who had come to Jerusalem to pay his Temple Tax would want to make some special thank offering while he was there. This appropriate act of worship was done by animal sacrifice. If he broughthis own lamb or pigeons--they had to be inspected for blemishes. The inspectors charged a fee. Of course, he could avoid all that and simply buy an animal which was already inspected, and which was conveniently for sale in this same court of the Gentiles.

It looked like a noisy carnival and sounds, for all the world, not unlike some Christmas Bazaars I've had the misfortune of attending. As usual, the people who got hurt byit all were the poor--the ones who couldn't afford a lamb to eat, let alone slaughter sacrificially. But worst of all--it was this--this display of economic exploitation that had been stamped on the minds of a whole people as religion. That's what religion is--that's what it can become.

Enter the conflict. Jesus didn't like what he saw, and in sheer righteous, virile indignation, cleansed the Court of the Gentiles by ejecting everyone involved. And if you like your religion soft and easy, if you think the phrase "peace and unity of the Church" means that no one is supposed to rock the boat; if you can picture Jesus with little children on his lap--but not with a whip in his hand--you re going to have trouble with the rest of what I have to say.

First--Christianity is not, and can never become--religion in the sense that I've used the word. Roger Smith said it well: "Christianity as a faith is always in conflict with Christianity as a religion, and there is an important--I should be inclined to say the most important--sense in which Christian faith includes within itself the permanent protest against its own religious forms and expressions." ("A Theological Perspective of the Secular", McCormick Quarterly, Nove. 1964)

BELIEF AND UNBELIEF
Mark 9:14-31
February 23, 1969
Communion Meditation

It's a difficult time in which to believe. That is one of the new realities of the 1960's. Religion continues to be popular. But in this rapidly changing, revolutionary age when nothing stays the same very long, authentic belief, in the traditional sense is becoming a very difficult task.

Some men greet other men with the question. "What do you know for sure?" and today the honest answer to that is "Not really very much" There are, in fact, very few absolutes. The more we learn about the world, about man, the less we seem to know that is absolutely and irreversibly true.

In the next several weeks, I am going to be talking about what we can believe, but this morning I want to focus on the difficulty inherent in the act of believing itself. And I would begin with the assertion that one of the new realities with which everyone of us has to cope is that it is a very difficult time in which to believe.

Our time is very secular, and although that is not a bad state of affairs, it does have a great deal to do with this matter of believing. Let me explain. The word secular, contrary to some of the things you may have read, does not mean decadent, godless, paganism. The word refers rather, to an evolutionary process by which mankind has slowly come to assume more and more of the responsibility for its own destiny and welfare. The process, we are told, is now culminating in our time. Dietrich Bonhoeffer described it as "Man coming of age"; and Leslie Newbigin describes the new, secular man as follows: "Today he knows how to control the powers of his environment. He does not pray to be delivered from disease or from draught; he gets himself inoculated or he builds irrigation works." (p. 31, Honest Religion for Secular Man)

That rather simple analogy defines quite adequately what we mean when we use the word "secular". Man is in charge; no longer is it possible to blame fate or evil spirits or God for the conditions in which men live; rather the responsibility is ours. In this sense, secularism is a good thing: when men acknowledge their responsibility for their own welfare, good things begin to happen. Dams are built, vaccines are developed, better methods of farming are cultivated and organs are transplanted.

It needs also to be noted that secularism is one of the goals for which Christian missionaries have struggled in other cultures. For instance, in India, the caste system, the untouchables, the practice of Temple prostitution were all based on religious assumptions and convictions. And not until the religious assumptions were either decimated - or at least removed from a position of power could India begin to cope with the very real problems of hunger and disease and poverty - conditions actually perpetuated by religion.

In our culture, some people oppose blood transfusions on religious grounds. Fortunately - in this area we are totally secular - and make our decisions on the basis of human need and the solving of an immediate crisis. That is secularism in its best sense.

Nevertheless it is difficult to believe in a secular age. If man, not God, is calling the shots, what does prayer mean? What about worship and all the other traditional forms of piety? Why bother? These are just a few of the problems raised by secularism - and it adds up to a difficult time in which to believe.

There are other reasons, of course. It's a busy world . harboring a knowledge explosion that makes the Encyclopedia Britannica obsolete before the ink is dry.

And the end result is a feeling of schizophrenia on the part of many Christians. For six kdays a week a man lives in a busy, totally secular world. And then on Sunday, he is confronted with ancient creeds, vague concepts, rituals that have lost their meaning. And if he is able to believe at all - it is a well insulated believing that begins as he comes through the doors of his Church and ends as he goes out through them one hour later.

believe and what we find we cannot believe.

I can't improve on the way Frederick Buechner puts it in his book, The Magnificent Defeat (p. 35) - so I will use his words: "There is something in me that recoils a little at speaking so childishly and directly. . . I am saying just this: go to him the way the father of the sick boy did and ask him. Pray to him, is what I am saying. In whatever words you have. And if the little voice that is inside all of us. . . says 'But I don't believe, I don't believe' don't worry too much. Just keep on anyway. 'Lord, I believe: help my unbelief', is the best any of us can do really, but thank God it is enough."

There is a lot of that believing-unbelieving father in everyone of us. Let's acknowledge it - let's confess it - let's bring that along with us as we come to the Lord's table.

This is the first Sunday in Lent, and we begin today to follow our Lord as he walked slowly to his death. The importance of that death is that it was for you and for me, for all those who have gone before us and all those who have come after us. It was for us - and nothing about us, our belief or unbelief, alters that fact. We begin our following at his table- at the place where he calls us to be - in fellowship with him. That is the incredibly good news of the Christian faith.

Lord, we believe: help our unbelief. Amen.

I Believe . . . The Father Almighty
Mark 14:32-42
March 9, 1969

Once a week, every Sunday, we stand together and confess our common faith in the words of the Apostles' Creed. We say "I believe in God the Father Almighty" Many of us have done it for years with monotonous regularity and one of the by-products of this ritualistic regularity has been a loss of whatever the words once were intended to mean. That is, what was once a meaningful ritual has become a meaningless procedure with no connection whatever with the realities of our daily living. What does it mean to confess belief in a God who is an Almighty Father?

In one evening last week I was involved in two experiences - just an hour apart, one of which strongly confirmed and witnessed to the Almighty Fatherhood of God; the other one of which seemed to utterly and totally destroy it. Let me explain. Before I left home for an 8:00 o'clock meeting, I attended to one of the pleasant duties of my own fatherhood - the bedtime ritual of two sleepy little boys. They had made small prayer books in their Church School Class and part of the ritual is to get those books out and say the prayer which they have memorized. One of them concludes something like this, ". . . and God will watch and care for me. Thank you God. Amen." It's a mighty affirmation which I believe more deeply in that moment than at any other time. Two sleepy little boys, clean, well fed, content, secure. As they say their prayers it's not difficult at all to believe in God the Father Almighty.

But the evening was not over. As I left the meeting on the South Side, a young boy about seven years old darted out into the street and was hit by a passing car. I was the first one to him. Crumpled, motionless in the unnecessary filth of South Third Street, dirty clothes - as I leaned over him I saw the two at home: "And God will watch and care for me. Thank you, God." What about this one? Thanks for what? His uncaring mother had to be ordered by the police to accompany him to the hospital in the ambulance. Is God an Almighty Father only to clean, white, middle class boys? What about this little boy?

That, I believe, is the issue contained in the rote, weekly affirmation. "I believe in God the Father Almighty." And I think every one of us has confronted that issue at some time, in some form in our own lives. Perhaps the war in Viet Nam, perhaps the millions of starving children in the world, perhaps the premature loss of someone very dear, perhaps the endless succession of monotonous days, devoid of joy and grace - leading nowhere. What does it mean - in the midst of life's terrible ambiguities - to believe in a God who is an Almighty Father?

The whole idea that God can be described as a father - in terms of fatherhood - is a uniquely Christian contribution. It is not necessarily logical; it is not the natural conclusion of a man who observes the world and other men and attempts to articulate a theology. The Greeks tried that and came up with a whole group of gods that acted pretty much like men. A typical Greek god was Prometheus - perhaps you know the story. Men had not yet discovered fire and without it were living in cold, damp discomfort. Prometheus, however, was a sympathetic god and decided to steal fire from the realm of heaven and give it to men. This he did, to the chagrin of Zeus, the father of all the gods. As punishment for his ill-advised behavior Zeus chained Prometheus to a rock in the middle of the ocean, and arranged for two vultures to tear out his liver which would grow again only to be torn out, over and over.

The gods of the Greeks acted like men, quarrelling among themselves, arbitrarily punishing and rewarding mortals according to the whim of the moment. For the most part they were withdrawn from and totally indifferent to the affairs of humanity.

Greek philosophy, on the other hand, conceived of God as an abstract idea. Plato, one of the greatest thinkers of all times, broke through the polytheism of his countrymen and taught that the ultimate reality of the unverse was a unity. There was one god, but the great philosopher could press his case no further than identifying God with the highest good. God remained an abstraction.

It is in the Old Testament, our own Judaic heritage that the word Father is whispered as the appropraite description of God. In the middle of the Pentateuch

Put another way, the Almighty Fatherhood of God is not a mechanical power that works to protect his children from harm. Rather it is a relationship that is broken by nothing: an intimate loving fatherhood that was with Jesus as he faced his cross - and which accompanies you and me and little boys hit by cars and grown men dying of cancer. It is a fatherhood of relationship that weeps when we weep - a love that is injured when we are hurt - a presence that laughs when we have reason for joy. It is a power far more profound than the mechanical arranging of events to protect and shield us. Gethsemane teaches us that.

What does it mean to call God Father? It means all of that and much more. It means for instance, that we are all brothers - not only by creation, but because of our common father's love for us. Here the doctrine takes on its inevitable moral implications. You can't call God father and hate another man, no matter who he is. The beautiful simplicity of that imperative was seen clearly by the early Christians One of them wrote," If a man says he loves God and hates his brother, he is a liar." (John 4:20) It's as simple as that, and yet Christians seem unanimously intent on ignoring it. Incredibly there seems to be no relationship between "I believe in God the Father" and the worst form of bigotry and racial prejudice. In fact, the latter negates the former. There is no belief in God the father that does not include a new relationship with my neighbor.

The dignity and worth of the individual, so threatened today and at many times in history, is defended ultimately here - here where we affirm the fatherhood of God. Leslie Newbigin tells how Adolf Hitler sent men to the famous Bethel Hspital to inform Pastor Bodelschwingh, its director, that the State could no longer afford to maintain hundreds of epileptics who were useless to society and only constituted a drain on scarce resources, and that orders had been issued to have them destroyed. Bodelschwingh confronted them in his room at the entrance to the hospital and fought a spiritual battle which eventually sent them away without having done what they were sent to do. He had no other weapon for that battle than the simple affirmation that these were men and women made in the image of God.." (p.62, Honest Religion for Secular Man)

Of course, there were millions for whom the battle was lost - but here is the final bastion. Here is the only final rationale for the still radical idea that every man is a person of dignity and worth and individuality. That's what it means to believe in a Father God.

There is much more, so much in fact, that it is presumptuous to attempt to cover it in one sermon. Forgiveness, love - these are words that have meaning for the Christian who believes in God the Father. Acceptance, comfort, ultimate security

There is one final idea, however, without which any work on God's fatherhood could not stand. That is, our Father God seeks us out until he find us; that his power over us is not mechanical coercion - but the power of an eternal love: that this love - this fatherhood is Almighty. It is an idea expressed in the parable of the Shepherd who seeks the one lost sheep until he finds it: or the widow looking for the one lost coin. It is echoed in the beautiful 139th Psalm, part of which we read together this morning. :"Whither shall I go from thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me."

The Father seeks us - in many ways. He seeks us because he loves us and his Almightiness means that the search knows no end. Not even death separates us from the pursuing love of God. The Confession of 1967 reads: "God's sovereign love is a mystery beyond the reach of man's mind." St. Augustine, centuries ago, observed: "God loves each one of us as if there was only one of us to love." Jesus said simply, "Father".

Amen.

Suffered Under Pontius Pilate
Matthew 21:1-14
March 30, 1969
Rev. John M. Buchanan

High up in the Swiss Alps, picturesque Lake Lucerne sits at the base of Mt. Pilatus. According to legend, when the mists and fog extend from the water all the way up the mountain the ghost of Pontius Pilate may be seen, washing his hands over and over, moaning - "What shall I do with Jesus who is called the Christ?"

Did you ever wonder why, of all the people historically associated with Jesus, of all the heroic saints who lived with him and died for him, the name of Pontius Pilate is the only one, besides Mary his mother, immortanlized in the Apostles' Creed? Pilate - the pathetic puppet governor - guilty of allowing the most monstrous crime history has ever seen.

Why Pilate? Why not Peter or John? Why not Andrew or ST. Paul? Pilate's name is in the Creed because it places the life and person of Jesus Christ squarely in history. It is there to guard against the idea of a transcendent Christ about which it is exceedingly easy to forget that he was a man. The name Pontius Pilate, mentioned regularly in the text of the Creed, is a reminder that Jesus was a man; that his life and ministry occurred at a certain time, in a certain place. But more than that, Pilate is a symbol of the power structure of the world - which when confronted with the absolute love and absolute integrity of Jesus Christ could do none other than consent to his crucifixion. He is the symbol of the way men dealt with Jesus 2,000 years ago, and the way they have been dealing with him ever since - washing his hands, desperately trying to avoid making a decision about him.

We have been thinking about the meaning and relevance of the ancient Apostles' Creed. Today we come to the phrase "Suffered under Pontius Pilate." We come to it now also because on this day the final, symbolic confrontation between the two men - Jesus and Pilate - the two opposing forces, if you will, set in motion.

There were, it is estimated, more than two million pilgrims crowding into the city of Jerusalem during the week before the Passover. Many of them were from Galilee: from the towns and villages Jesus had visited. These people heard that he was coming into the city and decided to meet him. When they went outside of the city gates to accompany him they were greeted by a strange and thrilling sight. He was riding on the back of an ass - something he rarely did, something uncharacteristic and unnecessary because he was travelling just from Bethany, about a mile and a half away. Immediately they recognized what they were seeing: "Lo, your king comes to you, humbly and lowly, and riding on an ass." The prophet Zechariah had promised that centuries before, and they could not help but believe what they were seeing. It was actually happening. He was coming. This one - this Lord - was coming in to the historic city of David, the city of the Temple with its rich heritage - in the precise way the Messiah was supposed to come. And so they tore the clothes from their backs, and the branches from the trees and laid them in his path, cheering, yelling "Now save us! Hosanna! Hosanna!"

The accounts differ at this point, but Matthew's Gospel relates that Jesus went directly to the Temple and there forcibly and violently ejected the money changers and the salesmen of sacrificial animals. Then he taught and healed. Apparently he entered the city every day and left again in the evening. But on this, the first day in the week of the Passover he set in motion the forces that would destroy him five days later. It was sone thing to go from town to town in Galilee, teaching and healing among its rolling hills and gentle people. It was another thing altogether to ride right into the historic capital of the nation with a noisy mob clamouring something about him being a King.

If it was the most crucial week in the brief life of Jesus Christ, we might assume that it was the most miserable week in the pathetic life of the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate. All he wanted was a measure of tranquility - a Passover

Third, the myth that he represented just one more religious cult: that his was a philosophic concept that could be accepted, rejected or ignored was finally and totally eliminated. His deliberate manner of coming into the city forced everyone to decide. There could be no neutrality after Palm Sunday. For those who preferred to remain on the fence, like Pontius Pilate, were terribly guilty of collaborating in his death. He left no room for the comfortable myth of neutrality.

This day destroyed all those myths - but somehow they still exist. Somehow, through the grossest kind of self deception religious people insist on embracing the myths that died on Palm Sunday.

We are still hung up on a definition of Christian evangelism as the saving of a lot of individual souls. Even though our Lord moved beyond this and came to the city - we would like to insist that the faithfulness of a denomination or a congregation can be measured in terms of the number of names on its roll.

Even though he bravely marched into the maelstrom of all that is worldly and political and secular, the myth that religion and politics, religion and economics, religion and social problems do not mix, still enjoys vigorous health. In 1964 the Internal Revenue Service revoked the tax-exempt status of an organization called the "Fellowship of Reconciliation" with the public rationale: "The pursuit of peace, disarmament and the reconciliation of nations is not a religious but a political activity." (Christian Century, March 20, 1963, p.357) That is prophetic. That, in a real sense, "tells it like it still is."

Because Jesus Christ chose to confront Jerusalem, the fact that people are dying in Viet Nam, and children starving in Biafra, and little ones retarded because of malnutrition in this nation, and adults languishing in hopeless despair in the rotting ghettoes across the land - is a religious problem. Or the fact that a whole community adamantly refuses to acknowledge its own racism - or that people can't find jobs or homes - or others who genuinely care - is a religious problem.

Even though Jesus Christ consciously and deliberately forced every individual in the city of Jerusalem to make a decision about him - the myth is still very much alive that neutrality about things religious is still possible.

Not very many people are overtly hostile toward Christianity and the church today, in the same way that Pilate was not opposed to Jesus Christ. But about half the people belong to the church and about half that number participate: and that means that at least three quarters of the people of this nation and this comm unity are still trying to play the game of neutrality. But it can't be played. Jesus Christ has made it impossible. Pontius Pilate tried and is remembered eternally as the man with the blood of the Son of God on his hands.

Legend has it that the ghost of Pontius Pilate hovers over Lake LUcerne, washing his hands and moaning, "What shall I do with Jesus who is called the Christ?" By indecision - by tragic, unnecessary, impossible neutrality - Pilate had him crucified.

On this day we remember that our Lord came to the city of Jerusalem and for one fleeting moment of time was greeted as the King. Let us not forget the eternal significance of that sojourn. Let us not forget that the myths were laid to rest and that neutrality crucified him.

Let us acknowledge that the significance of this day is that Jesus Christ comes into the midst of our common life - and right into your life and mine. Let us acknowledge that there is nothing in our common life - nor any area of our individual lives that does not have to do with him. Let us acknowledge that he has made our safe, blase neutrality quite impossible.

Let us sing our "hosannas" and remember that on this day he "Suffered under Pontius Pilate."

Amen.

"The Third Day He Rose Again From the Dead"
Matthew 27:62 - 28:10
April 6, 1969
Rev. John M. Buchanan

The President of the United States was there; DeGaulle, Thieu, Trudeau, U Thant; wealth and power, the Secret Service and the Marine Corps Bank; Cadillac limousines dispensing captains of finance and industry; even the Gothic sanctuary of the National Cathedral spoke of grandeur and might. And in the midst of it all - in the midst of this unique concentration of what men perceive as powerful, death, in stark, brute reality, wrote the final page in the story of a beloved man's life. The contrast was striking. There was nothing in all the world these men, and the power they represented, could do about the last terrible foe.

There was , of course, a majesty and dignity to all of it - as there always is when a great man dies. And yet Mrs. Eisenhower felt the same feelings, no more, no less, than millions upon millions of other widows; the same oppressive, helpless weakness best expressed by an inaudible sigh.

And in the midst of it all, a man in a black robe stood and in a straightforward, unadorned manner, read the words - the most glorious - the most optimistic - the most hopeful words words in the vocabulary of man. . . "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die."

That is very much the manner in which the New Testament presented the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is all very straightforward, without hesitation or awkward embarrassment. The New Testament doesn't argue about it or plead for its truth. It doesn't mumble, as if the resurrection could be tacked on to the end of Jesus' life, to be accepted or ignored depending on how the individual feels about these things. It simply announces it: "Now is Christ risen from the dead. Who can separate us from the love of God. Not life, not death, not anything. I am the resurrection and the life."

In the midst of the sophisticated pomp of a state funeral the words were read- in the same way that the words are articulated in the midst of all humanity: "The third day he rose again." But for most contemporary Christians it is not enough: there must be more.

We are, I believe, very much like those chief priests and pharisees who went to Pilate after the crucifixion and requested measures to secure the tomb. They were, the scripture said, afraid that his disciples would steal the body and then tell the people that he had risen. They were afraid of that, to be sure. But don't yuu think their words belie their real fear? Don't you think they were omore than a little afraid that he might rise up from that grave. Don't you think, underneath it all, they were desparately afraid of that and that what the New Testament is describing here is a group of frightened men wanting to do everything possible to protect themselves from that kind of miracle.

I think we are like that. Of course, the stakes are a little different. And yet we continue to insist on a life made safe from miracles. We continue to insist on rational explanations for everything in order to shut out the possibility of a miracle.

And so on this day all the traditional "explanations: of the resurrection are dragged out and placed on parade. "It's the language of poetry - but it really didn't happen. Jesus' teaching are immortal and will live forever. His loving spirit was resurrected in the lives of his disciples and he lives in people who call him Lord." Or - "he was drugged by thewine they gave him to drink, or in a coma from his wounds, or unconscious from pain, and in the coolness of the tomb he revived."

All the so-called "proofs" of the resurrection are discussed today and the effect of them is to make the event understandable and to protect us from a miracle. It's a little like discovering that you're sitting om a bomb, and acting immediately to defuse it. The bomb is still there, but now you may go about your business without

And, I believe, you and I know something about it because we have experienced it, too. Truth and goodness and honesty seem very weak - almost helpless in the face of life's brute realities. The world seems to smile indulgently at the totally honest man: unselfishness and sacrifice are not honored so much as they are exploited. And so we grow cynical and call it "being realistic."

Or perhaps we've lost someone very dear to us: someone who meant all the world to us: someone for whom we lived to please and to love. And suddenly nothing makes sense any more. Life has no meaning.

Or perhaps we've committed ourselves to some noble cause -- equal rights, or the relief of poverty --, and time and time again seen our cause sacrificed because of expediency. Perhaps we've discovered that the policies of our government, or the motives of our elected representatives are not blessed with a pristine purity, but rather reflect economic and political convenience. And so we throw up our hands in despair. "What's the use!"

We are, of course, treading very lightly on the most important, most profound question ever asked: "What kind of a world is it? Who will win the battle?"

The message of Easter is that the good and gentle man rose up from his grave. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the gloriously good news that no matter who is winning today's skirmish, the decisive battle has already been won. There is an ultimate integrity and justice and goodness in God's creation and nothing can prevent its ultimate victory. Not communism or fascism -- or the rampant nihilism of our own day: not cancer or heart disease or tragic airplane crashes: not racism or bigotry or vested interests. Nothing. Jesus Christ is alive -- the battle is won. The universe is good - and things do make sense -- life is worth living no matter what is going on at the moment.

From his prison cell in Nazi Germany, facing certain execution, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote to his parents: "We need not the ars moriendi, the art of dying, but the resurrection of Christ to invigorate and cleanse the world today... what a tremendous difference it would make if a few people really believed and acted upon that. To live in the light of the resurrection - that is the meaning of Easter." (p. 154, Letters and Papers from Prison)

That is the first direction. The second is that in a very personal sense we may know that life is the victor over death. Death did not hold Jesus Christ. He got up and walked away. Celebrating that fact, St. Paul wrote some of the happiest words I know. To the Romans he posed the question: "Who shall separate us from the love of God?" and answered -- "Nothing -- nothing in life, not even death." Writing to the Corinthians he concluded a lengthy dissertation on the resurrection with these good words: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" Those words stand alone: but I think George Frederick Handel best understood them when he put them to music in his famous oratorio, "The Messiah". The melody is lilting, almost giddy. The question is asked almost mockingly. He caught the essence of the resurrection: and that is that the sting and victory of the grave are simply no more.

We mourn the death of others -- our own loved ones - Dwight Eisenhower: we mourn a little every time we are confronted with anyone's death, because we are reminded of our own. From time immemorial men have been afraid. The strongest instinct within us is to deny and fear and battle against death.

Dylan Thomas said it well:

"Do not go gentle into the night
Rage, rage against the dimming of the light..."

Why Do You Seek the Living Among the Dead?
Luke 24:1-11
April 13, 1969

In the middle of the Easter narrative a very important question is asked. Three women went to the tomb in the early hours of the first day of the week. They went there to anoint the body - but also to do what people have always done on their periodic pilgrimages to a cemetery - to reminisce, to mourn a little, to shut themselves off from the reality of the present and linger a while in the pleasant memories of the past. And in the middle of this intimately personal and intensely private experience a rather rude question was posed - "Why do you seek the living among the dead?"

That question, of course, had a direct bearing on the event we celebrated one week ago. Jesus Christ was not there. The question was not rhetorical - it meant nothing other than the words express, "Why are you looking for him here? He is alive, not dead." We celebrated that affirmation: we celebrated the reality of the resurrection and the sanctuary was full. But I think the question itself has broader significance and it seemed to me to be appropriate this week to take a longer look at it.

"Why do you seek the living among the dead?" Or, "Why do we look for meaning and purpose in that which is gone and past?" We learn, of course, from history. We are only what we have become over the years. Only a very foolish man disregards history or experience as the first school master. But isn't it true that for some reason we get stuck in our own past: that we keep dwelling in it, perhaps pretending that present reality doesn't exist?

The older I get, and to many of you that's not very old, the more aware I become of the many, many people who make their lives a living hell because they refuse to admit that the past is gone. The more people I meet the more I am aware that one of the most common maladies of modern man is an almost neurotic refusal to live in the present: - yesterday - or tomorrow - but not today.

Sometimes it appears to very simple. I live in a neighborhood where many of the people are temporary transplants - home is somewhere far away: Lafayette is a brief stop over on the way to somewhere else. And I'm continually appalled at the degree of unhappiness created by this situation. Nothing is right: if only we were somewhere else: some of it is homesickness, of course; but much of it is simply a refusal to come to grips with the present.

Perhaps the problem is age. Most of us spent the first 30 years of our lives wishing we were older. I can vividly remember the agonizing years in school wanting nothing so much as to be out, and mature and earning a living. For several years the reality of life is something in the distant future and whatever is done now is done only in anticipation of that great tomorrow. And then a funny thing happens. Somewhere between 30 and 40 reality takes its definition, no longer from the future, but the past. Anticipation turns into nostalgia. We wish we were young again: if only we could go back and re-live those years of carefree freedom. And life slips by, slowly, while we refuse to live it. One of the more popular samplers that used to decorate the walls of innumerable homes read: "Yesterday is dead, leave it. Tomorrow may never come: don't worry. Today is here; live it." There is an immense amount of wisdom in that little cliche.

For others the problem is a marriage which hasn't been all that the initial hopes held out; or a job that hasn't delivered on the initial promises, or any one of a hundred situations - the reality of which can easily be disguised by living in the past.

Grief, too, takes its toll. There is a very natural process through which every grieving individual must travel. Shock, numbness, copious tears, bitterness, depression, hostility - and finally gradually normality. But many don't make it all the way through, refusing to deal with the reality of today, preferring to spend the rest of their days at station five of the grief process, and ultimately to die of a broken heart.

that number participate. That is, Protestantism is maintaining one church for every 75 people - a luxury the church simply cannot afford. And yet every effort to meet the reality honestly is met with furious opposition - a good example of which recently made the local newspaper several weeks before Easter. People just don't want to admit that we live in a new world - a new mentality - that the past is dead and gone.

Of all the institutions in society the church is too often the least open to a new idea - to the fresh air of honest realism. Ministers who would do something new - make some changes - know that the road ahead will be difficult and perhaps impossible. It almost seems as if people want the church to protect them from the unsettling changes going on in the world all about them. And it is my proposition that the church can ill afford to waste any more time pretending that it's still 1910.

The irony of all of this is that faith rightly understood, is a dynamic, living thing. Christian faith is anything but static. And yet the rubrics of the Christian religion can themselves take the place of faith. The forms of religion can become the occasion for seeking the living among the dead.

In the book I cited earlier, Leslie Newbigin points out that the forms of religion can be used as a means of protection from exposure to the Living God who calls men to live out their faith in the changing patterns of the world. Men, that is to say, seek isolation in religion from everything about life that is threatening and unsettling. That is not only tragic, it is the grossest misunderstanding of the whole matter of Christian faith.

A good pattern for the church, and the man of faith, is, I believe, clearly laid out in the account read this morning from the ninth chapter of the Book of Numbers. In that passage the people of Israel are making their way through the wilderness and the greatest temptation is to pick a spot and settle down and begin to live in the past. So the instructions are given: the symbols of God's presence - the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night are moving. And the Tabernacle, thetent of meeting between God and man, has to be moved so that God's people can follow him through the wilderness. The temptation to settle down must be resisted.

That is a wise word for the church and the Christian today. Newbigin puts it this way: "We must be ready for surprises, be constantly aware that the God who is so revealed is also hidden; that a lifetime is not enough to fathom the depths of his being. We must, to use the Biblical imagery, be pilgrims, always ready to move on... To know God, the living God, means to live in the constant expectancy of what is new, yet in the constant certainty that nothing which happens can contradict the reality of what has been revealed." (p.94,97)

In the life of this congregation, and in our personal lives, we need to understand that the basis of our faith - the love of God in Jesus Christ - is secure and neverchanging. But the world is in a state of flux - and God calls us corporately and individually to accept the newness and challenge of each morning rather than retreating into the dead realities of the past.

After all, the risen Jesus Christ didn't stay in the garden. He "went ahead of them into Galilee." To stay there - to remain by the Tomb - seeking the living among the dead - would have been to miss him - and to waste a lot of time.

Life is like that - and so is Christian faith.

Amen.

Living the Abundant Life
April 27, 1969
John 10:1-10
Rev. John M. Buchanan

To the objective observer of the American culture there are two all-pervading motifs which define life in 1969. The first is affluence. The second is a kind of rumbling unrest that occasionally boils over in overt protest or revolt. The congregation of this church is a good illustration of the first motif. Everyone here got out of bed this morning and put a foot down on the floor of a house he is able to own or rent. We will eat, before this day is over, more protein than the majority of the people of the world will be able to find this week. We dressed nicely and rode in automobiles to a well appointed place of worship. Most of us will spend the rest of this day entertaining ourselves. We are a good example of the meaning of the word affluence.

Meanwhile, across the river, the rumbling unrest has expressed itself, and the issue about which the unrest has coalesced is an increase in tuition fee at a university which we, the affluent, support with our taxes.

Increasingly, these two motifs define what life is about in 1969.

Affluence is a very relative idea. The story is told of the University Freshman who came home for a weekend. His father sat down with him after dinner and asked: "Son, how are things going?" To which the young intellectual responded: "relative to what?" Affluence is like that. It's relative, and because it is relative, it's a bit difficult, for those of us who are directly involved in it, to talk meaningfully about it. To see what it means we need to step out of our individual situations and try to get the "overview": to put things in a kind of total perspective.

One thing is certain: it is a new phenomenon. Now, to be sure, America has always produced its wealthy elite. But general affluence, as that word is currently used, began with the Second World War. Ever since that event, the Gross National Product of this nation has been in a steady spiral. Wages and cost of living have responded to each other in the battle for balance so that nobody seems to be getting ahead of the system. But the whole economy continues the climb. Everyone has more, and responsible economists are saying there is no reason why the direction ever has to be reversed.

It's easier, of course, to talk in terms of the visible results of affluence than it is to discuss its theory. We are comfortable. Machines do for us almost all the work our parents did for themselves. One of the standing jokes in our household has to do with the process of washing clothes. That used to be an exhausting, all day job. Monday was washday and nothing else much mattered on that day. Today we carry the clothes to the machine, add the magic ingredients and push the buttons. Simple things define affluence. Ice cream used to be a pay-day treat. Today it is a standard item in every freezer and in the mental economy of children occupies a position just a few grades above asparagus and sweet potatoes. From morning to night - from night to morning - we are ministered to by a fantastic collection of machines that cool the air, cook our food, wash the dishes, transport us to work, entertain us and wake us up again. And the word for it all is comfort.

Along with the comfort and convenience affluence has produced for the average family, an increasing amount of leisure time. We are free not to be concerned about matters that totally occupied our parents: free to pursue pleasure in television, movies, records, books - or simply in adding more gadgets to our households.

With time on our hands we are free to seek new sensations - in vacations, in alcohol - even in drugs.

But affluence has had other results as well. For one thing, people are probably more bored than at any other time and place in history. Whereas before the energies of men were totally absorbed in providing food and shelter, today we are free to fill our time as we see fit. And so - boredom: days and nights filled with the trivia of Beverly Hillbillies and giveaway bonanzas.

Jesus was talking to a group of Pharisees - the spiritual, and political leaders of Israel. They were the establishment, and they were very threatened by what he was doing - and specifically by his implication that they were blind.

They - the Pharisees - had defined the "good life". For them it was a matter of obedience to the law. It was a closed system, rigid and inflexible. The best a man could do was wrapped up in dietary regulations and sacrifical prescriptions. And on this religious base a whole way of life was constructed. Of course, it excluded a lot of people: the sinners who simply didn't care about legalistic morality: the unclean - who by birth or disease were not fit to associate with the holy men: the poor- who were too busy scratching out a living to afford the luxury of institutional religion.

It's strange how institutional religion seems always to perpetuate that pattern. Throughout the history of this nation Christianity has had the unfortunate image of a legalistic, dull affair, far more concerned with what a man refrains from doing or the kinds of people he avoids contacting than the quality of the life he lives. We are saddled with that image - and one gets the distinct impression that the Pharisees would be more than comfortable with the life of the average American congregation.

In any case, it was these men to whom Jesus was talking, and he held up before them an unforgettable image. He portrayed himself as a shepherd - and then quickly - as the door to the sheepfold. The mixed metaphor would have posed no problem because a shepherd slept in the doorway of the fold for obvious reasons. He led them in - and he led them out. He was the way.

The Pharisees, Jesus was saying, were like the thieves who climb over the walls of the fold and rob the sheep of their liberty - their lives. They are the imposters - they are the ones who are guilty of misleading the flock.

He concluded with another comparison. The thief comes only to destroy. "I come that they might have life, and have it abundantly." Not a narrow, regimented life within a closed system of religious rules - but abundant life, full, complete, exhilarating, adventurous living. There is quite a difference.

Jesus, the Shepherd, offered men two things. The door to the fold opens both ways. He offered men the saving, redeeming love of God. That's what the fold is - the security of God's grace. He confirmed for men the idea that "The Lord is my shepherd" - that "even in the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for thou art with me." In his life he expressed the truth that God's love surrounds each individual - that nothing in life, not even death, can separate a man from that love. The shepherd knows each one of his sheep by name; when one is lost he goes out to find it - and will lay down his life for it. Jesus the shepherd offers the comfort we call "salvation."

But the shepherd leads the sheep out too: out to grassy meadows and running brooks. He leads out to liberty and fulfillment and life.

One commentator puts it this way: "A fold is good for security, but too much security is worse than too little. . . a fold that is never opened wide becomes a cemetery; as a mind that never ventures into the wide universe that environs us will speedily decay and die." (Major, Manson and Wright, p. 820)

In these turmoiled times, living the abundant life begins when we are able to identify what we are talking about. It begins when we can seriously ask the kinds of questions raised for us by the campus radical. It continues as we learn that our affluence, by itself, means very little; as we become free to use and enjoy the results of affluence for our own welfare - and the abundant life of all.

Discovering Your Calling
John 15:12-17
May 4, 1969
Rev. John M.Buchanan

"You did not choose me: I chose you. I appointed you to go on and bear fruit, fruit that shall last . . . " (NEB)

That verse is a real enigma. The words were spoken by Jesus, to his disciples - twelve common men, fishermen, tradesmen, farmers - who were responsible for implementing what he had started. I would guess that they were as puzzled by the words as we are. How could they accept this kind of respon= sibility? How could they be bearers of enduring fruit when their first obligation was to provide an existence for their wives and children?

The words of Jesus are an enigma on a very practical level because, in fact, we all can't drop what we are doing and become ministers or missionaries. Someone has to "mind the shop". We are part of a very complex civilization - the wheels of which would come to a grinding halt the minute every church member decided to pull out and take on some full-time ecclesiastical task. That's one aspect of the problem - we all can't bear fruit - if by fruit- we mean the carrying out of certain well-defined religious responsibilities. But what if Jesus didn't mean for all men to abandon secular work? What if all jobs rare religious? That might make a difference.

The words of Jesus are an enigma, in the second place, because historically we have seen the tragic results that occurred when men interpreted them in the narrowest, most literalistic fashion.

By the time of the middle ages men had been conditioned to define the word "Vocation" solely in terms of the priesthood. All human enterprise could be ranked on a pyramidic scale, and at the top was the holy vocation of serving God as a priest. From there is was all downhill. The tragic results of this ideology were an irrational elevation of the clergy and a destructive debilitation of the laity. It meant that the clergy became the Church - and because the church so dominated the entire culture in the middle ages - it meant that all work - other than the work of the priesthood was stained with the worldly mark of secularity.

In a sense, we still haven't gotten over that. We still take some comfort in believing that ministers, alone, are called by God to their labors;and if a man doesn't feel in his heart that God wants him to be a minister, it doesn't really matter what he does with his life. We still persist in erroneously defining "calling" - as working for the Church. We still elevate the clergy and debilitate the laity so that no public meeting can get off the ground without a clerical invocation, even though the room may be filled with churchmen; and so that in the church the priesthood of all believers remains a giant myth, because the minister is painfully aware that he's going to have to plead with his people for a crumb of their spare time, and that often if a job is to be done, it's simply easier to do it himself. We perpetuate the heresy of the middle ages in many ways - for instance by expecting a minister to labor for the satisfaction derived - and everybody else in society, for the amount of money earned.

This, perhaps, takes us too far afield; but let it be understood that the words of Jesus about calling men will never really be understood so long as we relegate them to those whom the church calls its ministers. In that context the words remain an enigma, and a rather harmless one at that - because someone else is heeding them in our stead.

In the third place these words are puzzling because we're not very comfortable any more with individual piety. We aren't at all comfortable with the suggestion that God has a concern - a plan - a purpose - for every individual life. We refuse to see a relationship between our faith and our work because we've drifted from that most basic theological understanding that God's love is miraculously intimate and his fatherhood terribly real. And it's a little difficult to understand what there is left, once these under-pinnings are pulled away.

It may seem like a long way from a discussion of daily work, but we really have to begin with some basic theology. And when everything is reduced and distilled we are driven way back to the prototype experience of one man. His

that our individual tasks really mattered at all.

There are like problems with every industry - every job - every chore, no matter how important or humble - and the need is immense and urgent to recover what our culture has lost.

I believe the Church, and its Gospel, has the means of recovery.; I believe it is in a rebirth of the idea of vocation. I believe it is found in the call of God to serve him - using the words of Theodore Gill: "Whoever, wherever we are, whatever we do, we are ministers of God."

But how? - that's a fine cliche with the ring of orthodoxy to it. But how? Every life is different: every job is different - and the observer is going to vary. But I would suggest some broad guidelines.

First, no matter what the task is, it provides the opportunity for basic honesty. That is a sermon topic in and of itself, but did you ever realize how many decisions are made in the workaday world that assume basic dishonesty? I grew up in a town where every other house was curiously the same color as the box cars on the Pennsylvania Railroad. At Ford, I had to open my lunch bucket every day as I left - so that the guard could see whether or not I was stealing a tool. And Congressman Mendel Rivers - just stole $6,000 of our money to send his secretaries on a European vacation. I think we could stand a little basic honesty and I would suggest that we might find the beginnings of a vocation at that point.

Second, no job is without a certain moral responsibility. A professional person daily exercises his right to be morally responsible - or irresponsible. In the areas of law, medicine and education the decisions are clear. But they are there for everyone of us, no matter what we do. The laborer can give the company eight hours work for eight hours pay - or less. The mechanic, upon whom I am totally dependent, can charge me the same amount for a good job - or a poor job. And I won't know the difference. There isa moral imperative inherent in every job and I would suggest our vocation is to exercise it.

Third, and most important of all, every job involves other people, and we have the opportunity - in our work - of affirming their personhood and thus loving them; or treating them as objects and thus denying their humanity. It doesn't matter what we do, others are involved - and we can see them as customers, consumers, employers, employees, competitors, - or as persons. I think God calls us to the vocation of affirming the dignity and common humanity of all - and that the framework of our jobs is perhaps the most critical area for this vocation to be lived.

Finally, God calls everyone of us to become the best, the freest people we can become. He calls us to partnership with him in the continuous process of creation. And the great thing about work, in this context, is that it is all we have. Work is all we can bring. We have been given our talents, our intelligence, our creativity. We have been given the natural resources with which to work. All we really have to offer God in the partnership is our labor - our toil.

In the final analysis, then,k our work becomes our offering: our jobs become the enterprise of responding to our creator. No matter what we do, that is our vocation; that is our calling. And there is none holier.

Amen.

The Vocation of Parenthood

Ephesians 5:21-6:4

May 11, 196_

Last Sunday we thought about the vocation of Christians doing all sorts of different things in the work world. We thought about the vast religious pluralism of the [illegible], and how we become the context in which we are able to live our calling.

This week, I would like for us to be thinking about what is perhaps our most common task, a vocation most of us do have in common, a responsibility that is under our control - or [illegible] under our roof. I refer, of course, to the vocation of parenthood.

[illegible] reason [illegible] about my [illegible] and [illegible] fact [illegible] benefit [illegible] I'm grateful [illegible] Richard [illegible] his children [illegible] birthday [illegible].

I [illegible] will be surprised, however, that we need a sermon on parents. I feel that [illegible] that it [illegible] to dinner on the second Sunday of May isn't going to make much difference. In addition, I feel strongly that what happens after the act of giving birth is, or ought to be, the focus of a great deal of our attention, rather than the very common fact of biological motherhood. So - it will not be a typical Mother's day sermon.

Parenthood - being a mother, or a father, is a vocation, and it focusses on the related institutions of the familoy and the home. In this context, two general observations are in order.

First, the Home - as an institution, isn't what it used to be. Two major factors of life in the 20th century are responsible - mobility - and the growth and sophistication of public institutions. While we were in Nashville several weeks ago we toured the Hermitage - Andrew Jackson's hmmestead. Jackson bought the property as a young man, built the buildings and farmed the fields. It was his home for the entirety of his life. Many of his relatives and dearest friends lived there with him. Children were born, educated, reared, married and died in the house. In the garden is a small cemetery for an astonishing number of people - buried in the ground of what was truly a home. The Hermitage is a classic example of what once was - in varying degrees - the going idea of the Home or Homestead.

That is gone now - and the type of culture in which it flourished will probably never repeat itself. Today mobility in the word. We've been in Lafayette for 2½ years, and already we've the only original residents left on our block. This doesn't need documented - particularly in this congregation - where every springtime brings the loss of many people we have learned to know and love. Mobility, simply stated, has fundamentally altered the institution of the home.

In addition the traditional functions of the home are now done by very sophisticated public institutions. The school, the church, and the scout troop - together do for a child what were once the cohesive tasks of the home. In fact, our lives get so deeply involved with these other institutions that the home becomes little more than a sleeping place for several individuals. One observer notes that, "A home ceases to be a home when most of the members are about to leave it." (E. Trueblood, Your Other Vocation, p. 87) And that statement defines most of the households I know, including my own.

My first concern, therefore, is that we make a concertdd effort to re-establish our priorities. Our families are our first and most important responsibility. And yet, to live out of that conviction is no easy thing to do. We live in a culture that operates with a different set of assumptions. All of us know someone who works terribly hard at this job- under the premise that this is the way to provide for a family - and the tragedy is that families become the victims rather than the benefactors.

Several year ago, Fortune Magazine revealed in an article the fact that several large corporations in this country do not give major responsibility to happily married men for the simple reason that this kind of man will insist on reserving both time and energy for a commitment that stands ahead of the company. That's the kind of culture in which we live - a culture that invited gross irresponsibility in our primary task, under the guise of success and security.

Let's put our priorities in order. Let's acknowledge that nothing matters so much as those we have brought into the world - that if we fail here, nothing in life can compensate us for that very final failure.

The second observation I would make is that homemaking will never be the same again. Technology has changed the rules of the game. Tasks which once took all day, every day, are now done in minutes by pushing a button or plugging in an appliance. Thus, the homemaker, has time for other things in addition to feelings of insecurity about her role as the pusher of many buttons.

A growing problem today is the young college educated wife, fluent in French, conversant in Chinese History and Baroque music, whose time is consumed in changing diapers. Our culture has held out before her the image of emancipated womanhood and she has been led to believe that her contribution to society must be made in some profession. Elton Trueblood put it this way:

"It is assumed that a person needs rigorous preparation in order to be a successful architect, but the guidance of human lives is apparently thought to be on a different intellectual level." (Ibid p. 89)

I had the privilege last year of addressing a conference of Senior Girl Scouts who had spent several days discussing, with experts, every vocation open to them except the one most of them are going to spend the next twenty or thirty years doing.

Our culture seems to be saying that the action is outside of the home: there is little significance in cleaning, cooking and changing diapers. And I think it's time for responsible voices to didsent.

There is nothing more demanding, more challenging, potentially more creative than the vocation of homemaking and motherhood. The young mother in frustrated anguish trying to keep the children occupied because her husband is late for supper can rest assured that she's doing something more significant than her husband probably has done all day. Mothers of young children must be general practitioners in medical science, psychology, mathematics, chemistry; they must know some engineering, must serve as comforter, counsellor and arbiter - and most men wouldn't change jobs with them for all the money in the world.

The point is that mothers can see this - and live out of the self esteem that attaches to their role; or they can choose not to see it, be frustrated and not bring to their task the kind of sensitive intelligence it needs. Phyllis McGinley, the poetess laureate of the common housewife has summarized it well: "From the raw materials of four walls and a roof, a shelter over our heads, we will have made a home by force of our own personalities. We will have warmed, cheered and sustained the head of that house, turned progeny into a family. We will have learned a dozen skills and enjoyed the fruit of those skills. For us the baby will have taken the first step, repeated his first word.

We will have heard the school child call "Mommy" As soon as he puts a foot inside the door; not so much to have a reply as to be assured that he is safe, life is ordinary, and that we are there. We will have been raised to a dizzy eminence as final authority, dispenser of ujustice, necessary Presence. A husband, no matter how willingly he gives himself to the role of householder or parent, never approaches such triumphs. What more can one ask of a profession? God, as I said, must love housewives. It is time we also learned to love ourselves." (Sixpence in Her Shoe, p. 14)

Now, there are other things to be said, of course. A homemaker has a responsibility to engage herself outside her home. She is free to serve her community - to pursue her interests. In fact, a very crucial time comes in every woman's life when the children are gone and a terrible freedom sets in. An amazing amount of emotional problems and divorces occur at precisely that point. So it becomes a matter of responsibility not to narrow the field so much that a person shrivels and dies.

In addition, fathers are parents too. Our New Testament lesson was written out of a clearly defined Patriarchal society. In a sense, the pendulum has swung to the opposite pole. The head of the family, in many cases, and for a variety of reasons, is not the father at all - but the mother. I would hope that one might understand that together we are parents - equally responsible for the vocation of homemaking and parenthood.

We are, psycholgists tell us, the most significant individuals in the lives of our children. What they become is going to depend, in an frightening degree, upon our relationship with them. Boy babies begin to learn what it means to be men - as soon as they are born: - because tests have shown that fathers

handle their infant sons in an entirely different manner than they cuddle their daughters. We need to understand that. We need to know that we are totally transparent to our children - that what we do, or don't do with them is a powerful factor in their developing personalities. A child's attitudes about sex are going to reflect the manner in which the subject was handled at home. If he is made to feel ashamed of his sexuality - that his body is something to be hidden and ignored: if he learns that his questions embarass his parents and are studiously diverted - he's going to carry into adulthood a certain attitude about sexuality that may never be corrected.

If he hears his father refer to those niggers or that dirty Jew - he's learning. If he hears his parents expressing hatred for a neighbor - he's learning. If he observes another family praying before meals, and notices the absence of the ritual in his own home - he's learning. If he is taught to be honest and observes his parents living dishonest - he's learning. It happens in simple, ordinary, everyday ways. If your child answers the phone and you instruct him to tell whoever is calling that you are out, you might as well save your breath when you feel called to deliver a lecture on honesty.

We need to be reminded, perhaps daily, that our relationship with our children transcends all the other experiences they are having. We need to be reminded that our parenthood is the most difficult of all vocations.

And we need to be reminded that our ability to be effective parents depends in large measure on our relationship with each other as husbands and wives.

St. Paul writing to the Ephesians had some very straightforward words here. And perhaps it is no accident that he remained a bachelor. As I mentioned before he spoke from a culture that was clearly patriarchal. "Wives - be subject to your husbands." That culture is no more. But his understanding of the relationship between men and women in the home was firmly grounded in the realistic

appraisal of the human condition. That is, St. Paul "told it like it is,"

"Be subject to one another." That's where it begins. The New Testament writers called it Sin, and they were talking about that insidious egotism in every one of us that makes us put ourselves at the center of the universe and makes us elevate ourselves even above those we profess to love. That universal human selfishness makes marriage a contest, a battle of wills -- or an environment in which two people simply use each other for their own purposes.

He said, "Be subject one another," and what he meant was that each partner in a marriage must [illegible] and love enough to put their needs and individual [illegible] second to the other person's needs. We give it up and become part of a new unity -- a oneness that both celebrates and recognizes and respects the individuality of each person, which our Lord Christ died to build.

I wish I knew where to start, but I guess it doesn't matter with it in bed. For what it is worth, I suggest we start by simply and unashamedly asking to receive the [illegible] -- Love, reconciliation, forgiveness, -- Vocation.

We have been given a very special responsibility -- a high calling -- a call to ministry -- and it is our privilege to pass on to our children. Let's begin simply by remembering the importance of this vocation.

Let's accept it, with humility, acknowledging that it demands every resource we can muster -- plus a little of God's good grace.

Amen.

O God, for we have learned to call Mother, help us in the tasks of parenting. Give us wisdom and sensitivity. Give us the strength to love without counting the cost. Grant us openness with our wives and husbands -- and draw us ever closer to that perfect unity -- for which you have created us. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Love is A Many Splendored Thing
I John 4:13-21
May 18, 1969
Rev. John M. Buchanan

The trouble with trying to preach a sermon from a passage like that (I John 4:13-21) is that it is literally loaded with theological and ethical freight. There is a lot here - far more than can be articulated in one sermon. And so, as I worked through the text this week, I chose three ideas to discuss - three separate statements about the word "love". Each says something different about love - and yet they are bound together by the fact that they each begin with the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

The three statements are these:

- God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.
- There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.
- We love, because he first loved us.

Three statements - one strictly theological regarding the nature of God; and two containing very contemporary psychological and ethical relevance. Let's examine them more closely.

First, God is love. That means that when you talk about God, love is where you start. It means that love is not just one of many divine attributes, but the very essence of the divine. God is love. And everything else that is said about him is defined by the fact that essentially his nature is love. For instance, if we say that God is powerful, we need to understand that we are not talking abou raw, naked power - but powerful love. If we say that God is just - we need to understand that we're talking about a loving justice. God is love - and the final definition of that love - that God - is a lonely cross standing on a hill outside Jerusalem.

That love, the author of this little letter was saying, is the primal reality in the universe. Men have always looked into the darkness and wondered what is there. Some have felt a faceless power; some have felt an arbitrary fate; others have felt nothing. "Love is there", says this writer. Love is the final reality. And furthermore, a man who loves deeply is participating in the fundamental nature of things.

One commentator suggests that. . . "All deep human love strikes down somewhere into the divine, though it may strike darkly and with a dim feeling after Him who is not far from anyone." (Findlay in I, B) I think everyone of us has felt something like that, even though we are not able to find the words to express it.

A parent stands beside the crib of his sleeping child and feels something so powerful within him that he knows it is of God. A husband, a wife, feels sheer amazement at the fact that this one matters most in all the world. A Christian at Communion hears the words he has been listening to for years, and suddenly they are filled with meaning. These people - these friends and strangers; these ones I have worked with and argued with - these and all who have gone before - are one - and are given a unity by the very love of God.

To love is to drink deeply of the water of life. To love deeply is to do what you were created to do: it is to participate in the very essence of being a man.

God is love. That is the first statement and it undergirds all that follows. "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear."

For the author and the readers of the letter this statement had a dual relevance. They were gripped by two very real fears: the fear of judgment and the fear of persecution. In the first instance they fully expected the end of the age within their own life time. And naturally, there was more than a little fear involved with their anticipation of that event. But love casts out fear. Your judge is God and he is love, and he loves you and there is nothing to fear.

In the second instance, the era of Roman persecution was just beginning. The handwriting was on the wall. Very soon it would be dangerous

what we do in the world - on all three sides our mutual fear has become the midwife of hatred. I think the greatest irony of our age is that we are spending nearly 80 billion dollars a year to soothe our fears and it's not working, and furthermore it's never going to work. Currently we are debating the relative merits of the A. B. M. Safeguard System, a system that will cost billions and billions of dollars with absolutely no assurance of efficiency whenever it is completed. But we'll probably do it anyway - because we're afraid - and we've been conditioned to cope with our fear by making the other side even more afraid than we are.

On a more modest level, we find ourselves on the long end of a growing generation gap - because we're afraid of what the campus radical is and what he is saying.

We find ourselves hating the homosexual because we fear the threat he poses to our own manhood or womanhood.

Most immediate of all, we find ourselves in a brand new racial climate - and this time we're afraid. It is one of the interesting anecdotes of our history that racial hatred has increased whenever the white man discovered he had some reason to be afraid. There was no need for the Ku Klux Klan so long as the black man was property. But a free black man - a free black man whose mother was brought here in a ship, and whose father was the plantation owner- is something else again.

Thus fear - and then hatred. For two hundred years Southern white men violated black women at will. And then as the conscience of the nation slowly awakened so did the fear that the black man would retaliate. When the civil rights marchers walked through Cicero, Illinois, one phrase was shouted all along the line - "If you think you're going to come here and rape all our women you'll be a dead nigger first." (p. 67 Why Black Power, Joseph R. Barndt)

It always comes out - this terrible hatred rooted in fear and spawned by guilt. The very phrase "Black Power" frightens us - and fuels our hatred - even though we live in a world of political and economic power. The late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. summarized it well: "A guilt ridden white minority fears that if the Negro attains power, he will without restraint and pity act to revenge the accumulated injustices and brutality of the years. A parent, who has continually mistreated his son, suddenly realizes that he is now taller than his parent. Will the son use his new physical power to repay for all the blows of the past?" (p. 139, Strength to Love)

Is the Gospel relevant here? It is - but only as Christian people put aside fear - and realize once again that love is powerful - that there is no fear in love - that not only our welfare but our survival, depend on someone breaking us out of the trap of fear in which we seem to be caught. I don't know anything more relevant than that.

But how? How can we love that much? How can we incarnate that perfect love which casts out all fear - which runs roughshod over all hatred and bitterness? "We love, because he first loved us." That's how. We can't do it alone - something like a miracle of grace has to happen to us. We need help - even in our loving.

But again, this is how it is with all men. We are not born with built-in love for all men. In fact, we are born with the equal capacity for love or hate. An infant loves when he learns to love himself; that is, when he experiences his own loveableness. A parent calls forth love within his child by extending his own love. Reuel Howe describes it well, "Only those who have been loved and who love themselves are free and able to love others. The ability to love is always theresult of having been loved. This is true of the child's relation to the parent, and it is true of our relation to God." (p. 82, Man's Need and God's Action)

It's Not Easy to Be a Christian
John 14:18-27
May 25 - Communion

I'm disturbed. On this gentle May Sabbath I'm disturbed as I haven't been for some time. I share with you a very deep concern about the action of the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church, meeting last week in San Antonio. I am disturbed by the response to those actions which I have heard from the community, from members of other Presbyterian churches and from the members of this congregation. But mostly I'm disturbed by two questions that are asked by the General Assemblies' action and the people's response: "What binds us together as Christian persons?" Does anything? Are we bound together in any way that is different from the inter-personal relationships that prevail in, say, the P. T. A.? The second question is this: "What binds us to the Church of Jesus Christ? Does anything? Is there a substantial, tangible commitment to the church?

I guess I'm disturbed because the tempest in which I found myself this week demands that those questions be confronted and answered. I operate under the assumption that what binds us to the Church is our faith in and commitment to Jesus Christ. I operate under the corollary assumption that the faith, and this commitment, is expressed in our forgiving love and loyalty to each other. I operate under the assumption that there is no earthly reason for our being here - our being a congregation - other than this faith - this love and loyalty.

The uniqueness of this faith, love and loyalty is that it either comes first in our lives, or not at all. Faith in Jesus Christ is not conditional. It depends on nothing but Him. It judges all we are, every opinion we have. every stand we take. And if it doesn't - if it does not occupy that central position where we live and move and have our being, we delude ourselves by calling it Christian FAith.

And yet the church can survive on less than that: the church can exist in society as an association of congenial people. Individuals can maintain their church relatedness with far less than that radical trust in Jesus Christ - so long as no one rocks the boat; so long as no one makes the kinds of demands on them that require giving Jesus Christ sufferance over everything else in life. It's not difficult to be a Chritian until we come upon a week like last week.

I've heard from people last week I haven't seen in, lo, these many months. I've heard people call their church a communist organization who haven't bothered to worship in it - or engage in its ministry - or support its existence. And I've heard from many responsible church members who are deeply concerned, and who have asked me to speak to the situation. I have been doing that, of course, but now I would focus on what happened and what it means. I would preface my remarks by saying that I was as surprised as you by the news releases that began last Tuesday. I have no more factual information than you; nor do I have spectacular secrets to reveal. I have the rudimentary knowledge of how these things came about,. and some opinions regarding the responsible approach to them.

The General Assembly meets once a year and is the highest judicatory of our church. It is comprised of 420 ministers and 420 elders, elected as commissioners by their Presbyterys. The General Assembly guides, directs and administers the work of the church. In addition it speaks to the church and the world in its Social Pronouncements.

Social Pronouncements are, to say the least, a very sore spot with many Presbyterians. Many believe that the church should not address itself to the world, and I would disagree strenuously with this point of view. Apparently, so do the majority of commissioners to the General Assembly. In any case, a Social Pronouncement is first drafted by the Permanent Committee on Church and Society, again a committee representing the national church and including equal numbers of clergy and laity. These people meet, several times a year, with the staff of the office of Church and Society, to study, discuss and write the first draft papers that will go to General Assembly.

and methods or of the "Black Manifest" of which he is a chief mover. This manifesto obviously contains much that is impossible and much to which our Church must be unalterably opposed. But James Forman is att present the most disturbing critic of the churches from the extreme militant point of view. We need to hear him; to listen thoughtfully to him, to try to understand what he represents.

"I have received telegrams and letters protesting the bringing of Mr. Forman to San Antonio. Many have objected to the use of church money for this purpose. Those who wrote may not have recognized that the Assembly heard him not because it approved of him but because it needed him. And it would be unprecedented for a speaker to be invited to come to address the Assembly at his own expense.

"His coming makes it possible that some will misunderstand the most creative actions of this Assembly as occasioned by the demands of the "Black Manifesto" or as taken hastily in fear. The fact is that no church money is being put into funds which are under the control ofMr. Forman's group. The Assembly did what it did, through its own channels, and in its own way.

"I write this letter because much of the CHurch may be where this Assembly was seven days ago - uneasy, puzzled, unsure. We have ended in a wonderful spirit of harmony and satisfaction. I am convinced that this is nothing else than the working of the Holy Spirit in a group of earnest, seeking Christians who were gathered together in Christ's name. My prayer is that this same unity, this determination to do unusual things in an unusual way, this facing into an uncertain future in joy and trust may be characteristic of our whole church. Faithfully yours, George E. Sweazey, Moderator, 181st General Assembly."

The Church of Jesus Christ is struggling today with a matter of life and death - what is its role in the world? To what role is God calling his Church? In seeking to be a faithful communion, the Presbyterian Church has gone out on a limb many times, endangering its membership and financial strength, but only because the elected representatives of Presbyterian people have felt in their hearts that God was calling them to a new stance of discipleship.

To struggle with the role of the Church in the world is to begin with the fact that it is a new kind of world - a new situation internationally - a new set of realities domestically. The Church can decide to withdraw - to crawl into its shell and pretend that it is still 1910. Or it can thank God for the newness of the situation and engage it head on. I, for one, am a Presbyterian, because our church has consistently been alive to the world, and has tried desperately to be guided by nothing but God's call to faithful obedience. When we stop doing that; when we measure what we say and do by any other standard, I will withdraw because we will no longer have the right to call ourselves the Church of Jesus Christ.

After all, the church does have some rather specific marching orders as it seeks to be the agent of God's love in the world. And those marching orders do not contain warnings against tramping on toes, or offending political ideologies, or losing lmembers or money.

I think the marching orders of Christian people are rather clear. Listen to this paraphrase of the prophet Isaiah, written by J. Elliot Corbett, (Prophets on Main Street, p. 66) "Have you not heard the injunction of the Lord? If thine enemy hunger, feed him. Yet there are those among you who say, 'Let them starve, and let hunger be the curse of Communism. Let us not show mercy and love, but be as cold and calculating and ruthless as the enemy. Let's win for a change! Is your memory so short? A man in Central Europe said, "Let us waste no love on Jews, spare no mercy to captured Poles. Blot out the Bible from your mind. The sword is more important than the Cross." That man wanted to win, too. His name was Hitler. No, saith the Lord, do not adopt the attitudes or ape the methods of those who hold an alien philosophy. What does it profit you, if in the struggle with your adversary, you become identical with him? You have your own ideals to promote, your own principles to uphold. It does not take fire to put out fire, but water - Living Water. Is your enemy hungry? Feed him. Does he slander? Bless. Is he hostile? Show friendship. Does he act

Love Is Something You Do
I John - selected; Matthew 5:43-48
June 1, 1969

It sounds a little like a Charlie Brown sampler, or a Sister Corita poster, but "love is something you do." It is one of those "catch phrases" that adorn sweatshirts and picket signs, the subtetly of which leaps out of print and strikes down deeply within us. But that sentence also contains a very sophisticated and a very radical and a very Christian concept of the meaning of the word love.

It is difficult to talk sensibly about love for the very simple reason that the English language is poor here, and that "love" is an extremely versatile word. Linguists write volumes on the many meanings of the word and most conclude that the best thing to happen would be to strike the word from our vocabulary and begin to use a whole series of words that are more precise.

After all, we do use "love" to describe a whole range of feelings that actually are not even related. We love our country; we love a song; we love a school or university; we love a dress, or a suit, and automobile, our home. We use the word to describe everything from sexual relations to the relationship a father has with his son. We use it in fraternal organizations among men; in the life-long commitment of marriage; we whisper it to each other as adolescents and sing about it and now we've even used it to label a brand of cosmetics.

In the mythology of our culture we have been conditioned to expect love to "happen" to us one day; right out of the blue. We've been conditioned to think of romantic love in terms of bells ringing and lights flashing, and a temporary loss of our ability to function. What is worse we have so sustained the myth that many married people find themselves in trouble because these mythological definitions of love have just not been part of their experience.

When we use the word "love" , ordinarily we are dealing with feelings and emotions which we experience. But when the New Testament uses the word it has nothing whatever to do with subjective, experienced feelings. Love, in the New Testament, is something you do, not something you feel.

The Greeks - and the New Testament was written in Greek - had several words - all of which we translate as love.

Eros, from which we get "erotic" indicated physical, sexual attraction. In its best sense, and its original sense, it indicated the healthy desire of one person for another person. In our culture, however, the "erotic" has been exploited to sell motion pictures, and magazines and even weed killers. But, [illegible] eros meant physical attraction.

That, the Greeks understood, was quite different from what transpires between members of a family, or between good friends. That relationship the called Philia, familial affection. Philadelphia is the city of Brotherly Love: filial devotion is what a parent has for his children. We call it love: the Greeks called it Philia.

There are other Greek words that are translated love, but these two - eros and philia - bring the semantic problem into perspective. But when the New Testament talks about love it uses still another word - Agape.

One semanticist comments that "agape has neither the warmth of philia, nor the intensity of eros; that it refers to the will rather than to the emotion; and that it is concerned most about the demonstration of love through action." (A. Richardson, Theolobical Word Book of the Bible)

Agape is bene[illegible]tion, and notice that it has nothing to do with feelings. That is when we get into trouble. If you've heard many sermons chances [illegible] you've heard the content of this one several times before. Every school boy knows that love is many things and that the New Testament idea of love is a little different from what goes by that name in our culture. Everybody knows that Christianity teaches men to love each other. But we get stalled at this point because no amount of preaching, no amount of church-going - no amount of internal discipline - has been able to make us feel love.

We, like all men, are basically "responders" when it comes to love. We are very much inclined to feel love for those who love us. When it comes to serving or helping someone we do it generously and immediately so long as the someone

charity that literally gushes from the Church annually; because the beneficiaries of that charity are not really the poor - for whom the conditions of poverty remain - but the donors, the ones who have given without sacrificing or caring, and who will reap a harvest of good feelings from the gratitude of those they have given a few samples of affluence.

Christian love is not a feeling but an activity. It is not judgmental and it does not demand a response of gratitude. The third and perhaps the most important thing about this love is that it is the test of Christian faith. I read to you this morning from the first letter of John. New Testament scholars speculate that the author may have been the last living associate of Jesus. We know that the letter was written in a time when all kinds of divergent and alien ideas were creeping into the Church, and that the letter was an attempt to set down in writing some standard by which men and their beliefs could be measured. One general theme runs through this letter - love. Love is the test of Christian faith. This is how it reads: "Here is the test by which we can make sure that we know him: do we keep his commands? . . . My children, love .must not be a matter of words or talk: it must be genuine and show itself in action. . ."

It appears that the Church of Jesus Christ has spent a lot of time devising other standards: theological orthodoxy: adherence to certain ethical prohibitions - everything, in fact, but this ultimate test. But this is it: this is what defines a Christian: this is what he does uniquely and specifically - he loves.

How? If love is a matter of feeling, we are in trouble. But agape - love is a matter of will. It is a matter of living and acting in a certain way. And that we can do. How can we do? - choose to do it. Will to do it. Forget our feelings and love because that is how we are called to be.

And then, having divorced this process entirely from the arena of human emotion, a miracle happens. Feeling is born: love - as emotion reappears - but this time in a new way. Before, our love for others was based on their worthiness - and our need. Now we love - for no one's sake but God's. That's what agape means - loving for God's sake.

That's what the New Testament means by love. That's what the cross means - God's own unmerited love for us. That wasn't a feeling - but an act, a costly act. And it is the promise of the Gospel that that act - that supreme self-giving - that perfect love - is what enables us to love.

Love is somthing you do. May God grant us grace that we may - do it.

Amen.

Defrosting Our Religion
Matthew 9:10-17
June 6, 1969

The more I think about the situation that passage of scripture describes the more humorous it becomes. And the funnier it gets the more I see in it an immediate relevance for the Church today.

Jesus was sitting at table with tax collectors and sinners; he could go no worse than that. No body was more despised than the tax collectors. They were the quislings, the traitors, the ones who had sold out to the occupying forces. The sinners were simply the common folk - the ones who had no time for our inclination toward the niceties of formal religion. The Aramaic word for sinner (khumaa) is "the harried" and it is best translated "outsider". The word is anti-elitist. These were the street people - the common, ordinary - you-and-me people who lived from day to day, real as mud, with little, if any, concern about such constructed "christian ecology". Jesus was at table with these.

Now these tables sometimes weren't any too spacious. Perhaps in the big mansions it belonged in one of them. The image that comes to my mind is a common gathering spot where talk was cheap and conversation could laugh and smoke mingle and the world put down. I get the feeling here of a [illegible] corner tavern - in a large city's slum neighborhood - the kind of which we read recently, where a riot there began. It must have been something like that. There was didn't indulge in the afternoon luncheons - it was nothing so civilized as formal meal.

In my mind, there was Jesus, sitting with these men and we can imagine loud laughing and rough talking - and - people on the periphery - outside in the street, or standing in the corners. The image is not complete until we include the Pharisees. They were hovering around somewhere, clean, well appointed sober, paragons of piety and propriety.

They had come to see this strange prophet from Nazareth: they were secondalized by what they saw.

Suddenly one of them mustered his courage and shouted out above the happy din: "Jesus of Nazareth, - what's the meaning of this? How can you explain this - you who would come in the name of the Lord, eating with people like these?" I imagine them being horrified. They represented religion: they stood for everything that was upright and good and respectable. And this man - well, anyone could see that he couldn't be worth listening to.

There were others among the peripheral spectators. Disciples of John the Baptist: lean, ascetic men who emulated their teacher by spending most of their time in the desert wilderness, eating locusts and wild honey, regorously denying themselves for the sake of purity. The first stone was cast by the Pharisees. They threw the second: "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples fo not fast?" It was a little like getting caught by the minister, sitting on your patio, cool drink in hand, on Sunday morning.

For the Jesus fasting was an obligation on the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, and other publically proclaimed fast days. The reference here is to voluntary fasting, a personal discipline for those who wanted to do something additional as an expression of piety and devotion. It must have been a tense moment. Not many people agreed with John the Baptist, but there was no questioning their sincerity and devotion. And so Jesus replied gently but firmly: "Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?"

He did not, you will notice, argue with them about their fasting. He made no value judgement. He merely introduced a new idea - that celebration just might be an appropriate mode of expression as far as he was concerned. The image of the wedding feast is, of course, quite

common in the vocabulary of the New Testament. Weddings were real celebrations. The wedding feast Jesus himself attended had been going on for several days before he got there; and from the amount of wine he provided it must have continued for several more days.

That, in any case, is the situation described in our New Testament lesson this morning. The situation itself can be interpreted as humorous--if we consider the reaction of the Pharisees. But it is also a very serious and important illustration of the kinds of conflicts the Gospel of Jesus Christ encounters in the world.

There are several things going on in this situation. There is the [illegible] conflict between Jesus and the religious establishment. From the very beginning he was most critical of the very way that respectable people practiced religion. Very serious, outwardly, but it never had any substance to it, any real spiritual depth, no moral integrity, and especially no faith in the nature of things. The very essence was the same. He returned to this [illegible]: increasingly he criticized them and even poked fun at their piety.

There is also the conflict between the Gospel and the [illegible] legalism of the Jews. It made this position quite clear. You can't [illegible] on the cloth. Neither can you pour new wine into old wineskins. Judaism -- as a religion -- could not serve as the spiritual structure for the appropriate expression of the Gospel.

But beneath these deep conflicts -- which ultimately would result in his death at the hands of these same religious authorities, I think we can perceive also a fundamental difference in life style and the role of things religious within life. And it is at the point that I feel this passage has great significance for us today.

We have come here this morning, ostensibly, because we are very happy about something. We are here on the first day of the week to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. We are here to give corporate expression to our faith that all is well,; that our destiny is in our redeemer. We come here, ostensibly, because we need to give symbolic, ritualized expression to our gratitude for the goodness of God. We gather together, ostensibly, because God's gracious act in Jesus Christ has added a new dimension to our relationships with each other. All in all we have a very happy weekly occasion - a true celebration.

[illegible] we begin this happy act of worship with a hymn of lament:

"Out of the [illegible] depths, our pleasures and how fair
The [illegible] of my days, their earthly beauty is,
[illegible] sin. [illegible] alone, my heart realizes,
[illegible] deserve to suffer [illegible]."

[illegible] why [illegible] in the world this morning, how precisely [illegible] with the expectations - of the celebration we have planned for as part of the day. [illegible] I suspect, as we [illegible] songs of Easter Dawn [illegible] somewhat unfortunately. The Sunday's [illegible] and why [illegible] for [illegible] joy, joy [illegible] deep [illegible] heart.....[illegible] I may [illegible] never [illegible] a hymn of Praise in a Presbyterian Church [illegible] that [illegible] that [illegible] resembles the feeling that accompanied that. And I can't help but wonder why? Is it that the hymns are too hard? - I don't think that - anybody who can hum the chromatic and tone variations of "Happy Birthday" can surely do a creditable job on "Holy, Holy, Holy". Is it that we are embarrassed and self conscious about our lack of musical ability? That may be the case, and if it is, allow me to remind you that hymns are not for aesthetic satisfaction but for expressing feelings we can't otherwise express. And if they don't get that job done, we ought to find some other activity like clapping our hands.

I I've singled out hymn singing because nothing depresses me so much as mumbling through a glorious hymn of praise as if it were a funeraldi dirge. Yet the problem is not simple enough to be solved by"more volumn on the chorus". I think it cuts deeply to the heart of our own life style, and has to do with the same kinds of conflicts regarding the role of religion that confronted Jesus as he sat at that raucous table with the sinners.

[illegible] perhaps, reflects a life style that is mostly serious business. I have the feeling that the generation gap is widest at this point. [illegible] adult world, in which you and I do our living, comes across as a dull, [illegible] realm of unchallenging activities devoid of fun. The worship music and ritual speak to us the working communities of the world's work that is determined solely by the needs of that life and the [illegible]. Life is basically a serious enjoyment in responding [illegible] to an unfathomable God. We are reconciled [illegible] with God. [illegible] overcome that loneliness here, and we work for the [illegible] of the world, we [illegible] ability, to [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]. That is, we [illegible] a pleasure-filled experience in the [illegible] way all [illegible] [illegible]. It simply never occurs to us that this [illegible] - this [illegible] - [illegible] it is - is to [illegible] in and of itself. I think [illegible] this is - is a good gift of God - to be used and enjoyed as a normal thing.

[illegible] reflects a life style that doesn't quite know what to do with pleasure. But it also [illegible] a religiosity - expressed by the Pharisees. What is religion? For most people it is a restrictive, negative, narrow phenomenon that is best expressed in black suits and solemn piety. The Detroit Industrial Mission published a paper in 1968 which observed that of most of the industrial workers in that city - "the Church means not swearing, smoking, drinking. It means hushing up sex

it often means forsaking union membership. It means avoiding associating with the unsaved " [God's Chosen People p127] That is, religion means the same thing it meant to the Pharisees - as they looked down their pious noses at a happy, earthy gathering of common men enjoying each other's genuine humanity.

I think this congregation needs nothing so much as to "defrock it religion". I think this, not because life is a bed of roses - which it is not; not because the best way to cope with the tragic and depressing aspects of life encumbered with wars and riots and starvation is to ignore it - for evil is irresponsible. I think this way because the Gospel of Jesus Christ, believed and lived, makes pious ostentation in life and worship look silly as well.

[illegible] Gospel is good news - or it is nothing. Real Gospel brings a [illegible] joy - or it is a fraud - just religion. Christianity is a warm, happy, life-loving, life-affirming, life-enhancing way of life responding to the love of God. Just as it doesn't make a person [illegible] to laugh and enjoy, I either haven't heard it, or I don't believe it.

[illegible] salvation is available as we receive it by grace through faith, and we do believe, but what makes the case stronger is [illegible] our believing from our living and worshiping. It is, therefore, to the disadvantage - an appeal, very simply - to "deflect our religion". [illegible] could do this more than that.

[illegible] of Grace, give us the Ability to see each moment of life as a sacred gift. Give us the perspective to see our lives as sacred trust to be lived and enjoyed. Give us the grace to laugh at ourselves - at each other and at the goodness of your love. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Love Is Justice
June 15, 1969
Hosea 1:10; selected

Herman Melville was a gifted teller of sea tales, but he was also a pretty good philosopher and theologian. In his symbolic tragedy "Billy Budd", Claggart unjustly accused the tongue-tied boy of helping to plot a mutiny. Finally, after endless provocation Billy hit Claggart and the blow accidently killed him. Everybody knew that the death was an accident, and that the blow was the result of harrassment and great stress. The ship's officers were ready to acquit him of any crime. But the captain, a stern disciplinarian by the name of Vere, convinced them that their duty was to stringently apply the articles of war, particularly that provision regarding the striking a superior officer. So they hanged Billy. The law was obeyed: justice was served. Or was it?

The relationship of justice to love has always troubled and fascinated the mind of man. Where does love stop, and justice begin? For the past several weeks we have been thinking about God in terms of love. We have seen that our heritage teaches us that love is not so much one of the characteristics of God, as it is His very essence. We've thought about the definition of love as an activity rather than a feeling both the love of God and the love of man for his fellow man .. But still it is problematic. What is love? When does justice come in?

Parents know that their love for their children is far more than a feeling. They know that love is not an easy tolerance of whatever the child happens to be doing. In his best seller, "Between Parent and Child", Dr. Haim Ginott draws a very clear distinction between a healthy permissiveness and over-permissiveness. Over-permissiveness, - of over destructive behavior says "I don't really care." Parents learn that justice has something to do with love and that love without justice isn't really love.

But in matters outside the home - in religion, for instance, the relationship is not always that clear. Commenting on his conversion to Judaism, Sammy Davis Jr. said: "As I see it the difference is that the Christian religion preaches love thy neighbor and the Jewish religion preaches justice, and I think justice is the big thing we need."(Esquire 10/59)

Now that's very poor theology, but it is an accurate reflection of the image Christian faith has at this point. Too frequently our love, as Christians, comes out as nothing more than indiscriminate sentiment. Too frequently it is like the man who was hopelessly in debt; who inherited a fortune, and gave it all to the poor - without paying his creditors.

The relationship of love to justice is very difficult; and I have been helped by the insight that there really is no relationship: that you can't have one without the other: that when you're talking about love, you're talking about justice. I'd like to suggest simply, that love is justice.

The late Paul Tillich, one of the finest philosophic thinkers of this century advanced the concept that Christian love, acted out, is simply justice. He taught that in God himself, love and justice are a unity, and that both words indicate the same divine characteristic. The trouble is, again, with the strong tendency toward sentimentalism within the Christian Church. Without giving it much thought men define love as something you feel - not something you do. On this basis then, it is easy to convince yourself that you love your neighbor even though you don't do anything about it and it is possible to teach, as the great proponents of the social gospel did, that if you feel love for a man you really ought to deal justly with him. Tillich had the profound audacity to ask a very simple question at this point - "How does one love another man, if he is dealing unjustly with him?" The answer is obvious: unjustice is unlove. Love is justice.

The separate ideas that God's love - and that God is just are very old, nearly as old as recorded history. But this concept that love and justice are the same thing is a uniquely Juaeo-Christian notion that has its roots in the history of Israel.

infidelity. Neither in revenge, punishing the offender for the sake of punishment. But in a love - the very nature of which is to be justice.

Now - what do we learn here? What are the implications? Time will allow just a few suggestions.

First, we understand on an intellectual level that love is justice. We learn to tighten our belts semantically by differentiating between love without justice which is simple sentiment, and justice without love which is simple retribution.

Second, this intellectual formula has some very practical meanings. In our role as parents we see that if our relationship with our children does not contain a disciplined justice we can't call it love. By the same token we see that there is nothing more sterile than punishment for the sake of punishment, and that justice without the possibility of loving redemption is not really justice.

On a wider scale I would hope we might be moved to look again at what is called justice under the law when applied to someone who breaks the law. In fact, our second look will reveal a system that practiced punitive retribution without any thought of redemption. Capital punishment - is not justice - it is retribution. If we are concerned about the uniquely Christian concept of what it means to be just, we should be oppossed to it, and actively so. In the whole complex matter of dealing with the criminal the Christian needs to keep insisting that whatever is done he carefully weighs and measures by the standards of justice, and not merely reflect the neurotic need of our society for revenge.

The implications are many and I am sure that you are not only disagreeing with some of the ones I have drawn, but are thinking of some of your own. That is good.

Finally, I would hope that in all of this we have heard the good word of the Gospel. We are dealing with a God who really cares about us; a God who cares enough to be displeased when we stumble and fall; a God who cares enough to be angry at the evil and dishonesty in which we participate. But lest our religion be an expression of fear we must remember that our judge is our redeemer; that the one who measures us - measures us lovingly.

The winsome words of Hosea remind us that our God has been pursuing his children in love down through the centuries: that his pursuit took him among men and ultimately to the cross: that no matter who we are, or what we have done or what we will do, God continues to pursue everyone of us - until we turn to him in faith and obedience.

Theat is the good news. God is love - justice: justice - love, now and forevermore. Amen.

Playing at Religion

Matthew 11: 7-19
September 21, 1969
John M. Buchanan

Once upon a time two explorers came upon a clearing in the jungle. In the clearing were growing many flowers and many weeds. One explorer says: 'Some gardner must tend this plot.' The other disagrees: 'There is not gardner.' So they pitch their tent and set a watch. No gardner is ever seen. 'But perhaps he is an invisible gardner.' So they set up a barbed wire fence. They electrify it. They patrol it with bloodhounds. But no shrieks ever suggest that some intruder has received a shock. No movements of the wire ever betray an invisible climber. The bloodhounds never give a cry. Yet still the "Believer" is not convinced. 'But there is a gardner, invisible, intangible, insensitive to electric shocks, a gardner who comes secretly to look after the garden he loves.' At last the Sceptic despairs: 'But what remains of your original assertion? Just how does what you call an invisible, intangible, eternally elusive gardner differ from an imaginary gardner or even from no gardner at all?' [Martin C. D'Arcy, S.J. in Varities of Unbelief, M. Marty p. 49]

That story, attributed to a Frency theologian, is a parable of the spiritual predicament of modern man. Indeed we have pitched our tents and built our fences and retreated behing endless collections of theological jargon. But the relentless press of modern science, modern thought, has not abated, and the general theory of the times is that the gazdner is either totally non-existant, or else an imaginery figment that ought to be preserved for the security and health of human life. In either case the articulate Christian is confronting a rather serious challenge to his integrity and to his faith. *

The story of civilization can be described as a man's show but steady emergence from dependency on God to a state of independence. "Secularism" is the word for it, and we are living in an age where it has come to full fruition. At some point in the last century the scales were tipped. Up until that point the idea of God played a determining role in the affairs of men; God the ruler and controller of nature; God the providential mover in history God the protecter of good men and the judge of evil men. But the scales have been tipped; the process is reversed. As one writer put it: "We don't pray for rain anymore - we build irrigation systems: we don't pray for deliverence from a plague, we invent a vaccine." In our time men have "come of age" and learned to do for themselves many of the things once attributed to God. And the result is a severe theologic al predicament.

Alfred North Whitehead observed that: "Each age has its dominant preoccupation, and during the three modern centuries the cosmology derived from science has been asserting itself at the expense of older points of view with their origins elsewhere." [Ibid p.135] And Walter Lippman: "The radical novelty of modern science lies precisely in the rejection of the belief, which is at the heart of religion, that the forces which move the stars and atoms are contingent upon the preferences of the human heart." [Ibid p. 135]

Science tipped the scale. We have learned that heaven is not "up there": that certain atmospheric conditions gave girth to Hurricane Camille, not the wrath of God: and that people get lung cancer because they smoke - not because they offended the Heavenly Father. A perceptive person will realize that science has done Christian faith a great favor by precipitating a crisis; by

Jesus was saying that his contemporaries were like children at play in their practice of religiosity. As in child's play, ritual counted more than reality. Observing the sacrificial law was more important than actually living grateful lives. As in child's play - no one really expected the results of the exercise to be of any consequence. So one could go through the motions of devotion to the God of Justice and then steal money from one's tennants. His contemporaries were "playing at religion" and I wonder whether the preponderence of religion today - in a culture that has totally rejected the possibility of God is not evidence of the same situation. I wonder if we are not playing at religion.

Recent studies of American church goers have revealed among other things that there is as much bigotry and racial prejudice in the church as there is in the non-churched portion of the population. That, I would suggest, is utterly impossible, unless a lot of those church-goers are just playing at their religion. We are reminded every year at about this time that the Lord who demands total self-giving, actually gets about 2% of our treasure as an expression of our faith, and I would suggest that that too is possible only if a lot of us are just "playing a game."

Someone recently asked James Foreman why he brought his demands to the church - instead of General Motors or I.B.M. His answer was that General Motors and I.B.M. never said their purpose was to feed the hungry, and help the poor, and liberate the oppressed - but the church has said that. Mr. Foreman's marxist ideology and violent rhetoric is most offensive to me. But he has done this - he has caught us in the act of "playing at religion." For there would be no James Foreman today, no racial revolution if the Church of Jesus Christ, and the Christian people of this nation had been doing something other than playing for the last two hundred years.

You and I are part of the secular culture of the 20th century. We are part of the Church of Jesus Christ of which I have been so critical. We are able - you and I - to engage in an exercise of criticism such as this - but it is no more than exercise until we focus. You and I, specifically, are related to each other through this congregation of Christians. And so let's look here, Are we "playing at religion" in Bethany Presbyterian Church?

There are many aspects of the life of this congregation that might be examined in light of this question. But one thing we all do: one activity is at the center of our experience as a congregation, and that is corporate worship. In my conversations with you - and in my personal reflections upon our Sunday morning experience I sense a rather vague feeling that worship is not really too important. I sense that we are most vulnerable at this point to the charge of playing - placing ritual over reality, not really expecting anything of consequence to result.

While I was thinking about this topic last week I came across an article in The Christian Century (9/17/69) by Dr. Browne Barr, a very effective pastor, which was quite helpful. Dr. Barr proposes that crisis in worship today is at the point of preaching. Congregations are deluged with what he terms "Pop Sermons" which, like Pop Art, are "so negligible as artifacts that all which remains for the critic (or worshipper) is to talk about, around, behind and across it." Men are not moved by such art, they simply discuss it. So, men are not moved by such sermons, they merely discuss them.

I was both humbled and stirred by his description of a real sermon: "It is an instrument by which the great hand of the eternal grasps us, people and preacher alike; a hand which leads or drives

Victims or Victors
Job 18 - Romans 8:31-39
September 28, 1969
John M. Buchanan

"Into every life some rain must fall." That's an inncouous little cliche with which we attempt to soothe young children when a party has been cancelled. But at the same time it is a great and terrible truism about every life, young or old, rich or poor. Death and taxes may be the only absolute inevitabilities in our lives, but the odds are very high that several other semi-inevitabilities will happen to us - like serious illness, grief, deadening disappointment, professional failure - and so on. Everyone of us, some more than others, but nevertheless everyone of us, will encounter serious tragedy along our pilgrimage. Some of us have confronted a crisis recently: some of us are in the process of working through a problem right now: some of us will have the bottoms pulled out of our little worlds in the near future. It is part of life - and I am suggesting that when it happens, whatever it is, we can be either victims or victors.

Now, I have set this sermon in the context of personal tragedy or crises, because it is at this point precisely that the relevance or irrelevence of Christian faith is posited. Furthermore, while faith in Jesus Christ involves a total life style, including the good and the bad, it is when the news is bad that the Good News of the Gospel is most improtant. I would prosecute my case by directing you to two portions of scripture - one from the Old Testament, a poet's soliloquy about a man named Job; the other from the New Testament, penned by a man who knew the power of God's love in the midst of tragedy; namely St. Paul.

Any discussion of tragedy that seeks to be faithful to the Biblical witness must ultimately come to grips with the story of Job. I am always pleasently surprised to hear people in the hospital express a certain encouragement and comfort derived from their observation of people who are sicker than they are. I think it is a mark of strength and sensitivity, "No matter how bad things are, someone else is having it worse."

The story of Job serves in this capacity. If you think you have problems you haven't seen anything till you hear about Job.

Job was a good man; a devout and pious man who served the Lord, who was loved by his family and esteemed by his collegues - but one day, Job's life came crashing in upon him. A series of messengers came to Job with the news that three raids by bandits had resulted in the theft of all of his oxen, asses, sheep and camels, and that everyone of his servants had been slain. A man of considerable wealth suddenly had absolutely nothing. And if this were not enough, even while the third messenger was telling his story, another appeared to report that a violent wind storm had flattened the house in which his sons and daughters were eating and that they were all dead.

Job comment: "Naked I came from my mothers' womb, and naked I shall return; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

But his troubles were not over. For Job was afflicted with "loathsome sores" from the top of his head to the soles of his feet. And we see him - totally humiliated, crushed - nothing left - not even the personal dignity of worthfulness - sitting in a pile of ashes, scratching his sores.

Three friends came to Job, and after sitting andmourning with him for a week, attempt to explain to him why all of this has happened. But it doesn't work; nothing fits. The traditional answers to the question of suffering are flat and stale. It is unfortunate that by some gross misunderstanding of the story Job

God". But there is more: there is another word. If the "Victim or Victor" suggestion has any validity, the Job story probably brings us down somewhere between the two: somewhere at the point of courage or endurance - but something less than victory.

St. Paul provided the further, and distinctly Christian word. He had been in jail several times, beaten, flogged, humiliated, separated from all his possessions - and ultimately would die a martyrs' death. But he could write: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."

That kind of thinking takes us past the point of mere endurance. It suggests that the God to whom we turn in time of trouble is supremely a God of love. It announces that nothing life does to us alters the love of God for us. And that love can transform us from pathetic victims into Victors.

That is the Good News of the Gospel.. That is the point at which Christian FAith confronts us at our deepest, most desparate, need. In fact, it is so good that we have difficulty accepting it. I think one of the most difficult theological concepts for us to handle is the idea that the love of God is not a protective device which shelters us from harm and tragedy; but rather an enabling device which gives us the power to emerge victorious from whatever happens to us. Everyone of us has confronted tragedy and wanted to shout in the face of God - "Why me? Why this?" Everyone of us has felt that life is empty of meaning and that we are alone in a dark void. And the Good News of the Gospel is that the love of God is with us - even there, in that dark void; that it can and will transform the darkness of the present into the bright light of dawn.

Basic to all of this is the concept of love as a transforming power. That's how Paul understood it, and I think we know something about it too. As parents we can't do very much to alter the circumstances that have resulted in unhappiness or hurt for our children. They come to us - insulted by a friend, or physically hurt or crushed by an incident at school. And instinctively we gather them in our arms, loving them, assuring them, supporting them. And our love becomes a transforming power. The situation hasn't changed - but the person has. Love turns a victim into a victor.

A man can be knocked down every day, disappointed in his aspirations, a failure in his plans - but the love of his wife can literally be a transforming power - to which he can retreat - and from which he can derive the strength to carry on another day.

God is like that: the love of God expressed in Jesus Christ is that kind of power; power to transform victims into victors.

Claude A. Wesley, principal of a Negro elementary school in Birmingham, Alabama drove his little girl to Sunday School one Sunday morning, dressed in her best. She never came home. This is what Mr. Wesley said: "I drove Cynthia to Sunday School and went to get some gasoline for my car. I was just a few blocks away when I heard the explosion. I knew it was our church. I rushed back but I could not find Cynthia. I wanted to think that she had left the church, but someone told me I'd better go to the hospital. There they asked me what she was wearing. I told them a little class ring. They pulled out her hand and I saw the ring. Then I saw her patent leather shoes and white socks and I said, 'That's her.' I have not asked why it happened to us. I don't feel bitter about it....."
[from Interpreting the Times, The Protestant Hour, 1967, George T. Peters]

Religion for the "Now Generation"
Romans 5:1-11
October 12, 1969
John M. Buchanan

At a retreat last week for the ministers of Crawfordsville Presbytery, I had the privilege of hearing Dr. Lowell Colston, a leading authority in the field of Pastoral Care. Dr. Colston, among many other things, called our attention to what I consider to be two very important observations about 20th century American man.

First, he reminded us that we are very much inclined to get involved in symbols, to the degree that the symbols become more important to us than the reality they are supposed to symbolize. Consider, for instance the American Flag as a symbol, the word "patriotism" as a verbal symbol, and the actual reality -- the love for and loyalty to the nation these symbols are supposed to represent. The fact is that many people are so pathologically obsessed with the symbols that the reality is totally lost. This week our community will be visited by a leading spokesman for the John Birch Society. And while it is probably unfair to prejudge, if Mr. Griffin is typical of others who speak for his organization, he will wave the flag a lot and use the word patriotism as frequently as possible and then proceed to encourage his listeners to treat the constitutional structures of the nation with utter contempt.

We get overly involved with symbols -- at the expense of reality. I am reminded of the comment by J. S. Whale, a very articulate theologian, that the greatest danger to Christian theology comes from scholars who stay in their studies writing laboriously about the words "redemption" and "reconciliation" without ever having felt redeemed or reconciled as an experienced reality.

The second important thing Dr. Colston said was that most of us are conditioned to avoid, at all costs, an expression of or an encounter with very deep human feelings. And, as if to document the truth of his thesis, the assembled ministers acted according to the script. In the course of one discussion a young minister mentioned his admiration for John R. Fry, controversial pastor of Chicago's First Presbyterian Church. An older pastor expressed his disagreement with a little passion, and both men got angry.

was going to be. So I should have enjoyed myself instead of longing for future fulfillment." The college student counts the days till graduation. The young executive lives for the next raise and promotion. Harried parents long for the freedom that will accompany their children's maturation. Middle age people look forward to retirement. And the result is an entire life cycle of waiting -- waiting for fulfillment, happiness, meaning, satisfaction -- on the premise that whatever those words mean -- they will be experienced sometime in the future but not now.

Enter the "Now Generation". All of a sudden we are confronted by a whole culture within a culture that isn't buying any of it: a generation that wants so desperately to document their rejection of "when my ship comes in ism" that nothing is too absurd, too outlandish, too shocking, if it drives home the point. The theology of the "Now Generation" is that it is a denial of life to be consumed with banking today for tomorrow's withdrawal. Participation, contribution, fulfillment - happens now, or never. Human experience is now -- not later. Human feeling -- emotion is to be felt and experienced with intensity and is not to be subdued. And so psychedelic colors are so bright that our eyes hurt. And blaring acid rock is amplified so greatly that our ears hurt. Minds must be bent and expanded with drugs in order to experience and feel more. Soul music pours out the deepest human feeling. Sexuality is not only celebrated, as it should be, but defied and glorified, and taught to be experienced now by anyone and everyone.

And the good old "when my ship comes iners", which includes most of us here today -- and everyone over thirty, simply shake our heads and long for those simpler, quiet days of yesteryear. Sometimes for good reason. The "Now" mentality has given rise to excesses aplenty. In fact, human existance is far more than being titillated and stimulated every minute. And in the final analysis, the "experience everything now" mentality may be as phony as the "when my ship comes in ism" that it hopes to supplant.

But mostly, we shake our heads and feel threatened and sometimes frightened because we simply cannot cope with the whole concept that life is to be lived and celebrated now, not tomorrow; that significance and meaning must be derived from what is happening now,

suffering those were to be stoically born in the knowledge that at least it all will be over soon. The early Christians, that is to say, were indulging in "when my ship comes in ism."

But Paul saw things differently. Salvation is something men experience now -- not just in the future. The peace of Jesus Christ is experienced now in the midst of life's hum drum and suffering. The gap between God and man has been closed. The forgiving act men were trying to perform themselves had already taken place.

One New Testament commentator summarizes this radically good news as follows:

"Our peace with God has been secured: let us possess and enjoy it. We have actually been given access to God's gracious favor and we are actually standing in it; let us realize our situation and be glad. Let us inwardly be what we are in objective fact. Let us actually be the justified, acquitted persons we are. The essential redeeming, reconciling work has been done -- it has been done for us! The enmity has been overcome. God has restored us to our true place within his family. Let us rest and rejoice in him." (John Knox, Life in Christ Jesus, p. 17)

The Good News which St. Paul so gladly proclaimed, and the Gospel in which we stand today is rooted in our remembrance of the Jesus Christ who lived and died among men, and who arose from his grave to be eternally present in the common life of humanity. That Gospel, as Paul understood, and as we need to understand, is for the "now".

Jesus himself, announced that the Kingdom of God was at hand; not coming in the future -- but in the "now", the present moment. One writer put it this way, "Jesus lived his life in such a way that he encountered every man he met with a radical decision for or against the presence of God in the now. The one thing he kept reminding his hearers was that the expected reality for which they were looking, the delivering event for which they hoped, the reign of God's love for which they yearned was at hand!" (Thomas Oden, The Celebrating Community, p. 97)

That, of course, is the Good News. Our hope has been fulfilled. Our hope for eternal security has been accomplished. We don't have to worry. We don't have to spend

The New Humanity
Romans 5:12-21
October 19, 1969
John M. Buchanan

William Barclay, a very articulate British theologian and New Testament scholar, introduces the text we have before us this morning - Romans 5:12-21 - with a warning. It is, he says, at once one of the most influential and most difficult passages in the entire New Testament. On another occasion I began a sermon with a similar statement about a similar text, and was later chided gently by a listener who felt that an apologetic introduction revealed my own lack of security. That well may be, for here I confess a certain trepedation before a great and difficult portion of scripture. And I am convinced that it is far better to confess that than to either ignore the passage, or to present it in a dangerously over-simplified form. Wherever we come out, that latter approach would short change you. And so I begin with Barclay's warning. This is a very important and very difficult passage and those who still live with the myth of a "simple gospel" are about to be bored or confused, and probably both.

I would invite you, in the hackneyed school-room phrase to "dawn your thinking caps". I would hope we might think theologically this morning, and I invite you to this task, not for the sake of intellectual exercise, but because I believe God's word is appropriated to us when we struggle with the deep truths of the Gospel, and the deep doubts of our own minds.

The passage in question is made more difficult by the fact that Paul, having begun his arguement, is reminded of an objection to his logic and goes off in another direction in response to that objection. The main arguement resumes later. The printed text in your bulletin omits this digression.

A key to the major thrust of Paul's thought may be found in a contempory analagous situation. Not long ago, in a cave on a remote South Pacific island, a Japanese Soldier was discovered who had been hiding and living there - since 1944. He had never heard that the war was over. He was motivated by the reality of the struggle in which his nation was involved. When he was told that the war was over - that is, a new reality now exists - he could not and would not believe it.

That, with certain obvious limitations, is an analogy of the human predicament according to Paul. Humanity is trapped by an old set of realities that no longer exist. There is a new Reality - a new humanity - but men either cannot or will not believe it.

But this is getting ahead of ourselves. To understand Paul's thought we must come to grips with the three main themes which underlie his argument: Three ideas which he and his readers simply assumed, but which have very little currency today.

The first is the "Solidarity of Man". Paul was a Jew, and one of the cornerstones of all Hebraic thought is that mankind, humanity, is a unity, a family, or a corporate reality, and that this corporateness is prior to and more important than individuality.

The Jews thought in terms of clan, and tribe and nation. A Jew was a Jew - and for that matter still is - not because of theological persuasion - but because he is part of a people. The simple survival of the Jew and the rennaisance of Israel as a nation state is testimony to the tremendous power of this idea.

When a man committed an offense, his clan or tribe was held accountable. When one man sinned the nation was guilty. The Jews simply thought in terms of the group - not the self. When the Psalmist asked "What is man that thou are mindful of him?" he didn't mean "Who am I?" He meant "What is this corporate reality - this humanity - this 'man'?"

Now we have trouble with this central Biblical idea because we have been schooled and nurtured in its categorical opposite. "Individualism" has characterized Western thought since the Industrial Revolution. Individualism is at the base of capitalism and democracy and is firmly lodged at the focus of the American mentality. So much so that it becomes, at times, a fettish with us. I've know people who didn't like the minister talking about "the community of faith" because it sounded too much like a "commune". In any case we think in terms of the individual, not only economically, but deeply - philosophically. If we have any feel for humanity because we are

moments we think about it, and worry about it and feel afraid of it. At sometime in our late twenties or thirties a very traumatic thing happens to us. We wake up one day and realize that we are going to die. We knew it before, of course; we knew that biologically the system would stop; intellectually we had confronted death in about the same way we confronted all the other life processes. But suddenly it is real it's going to happen to me: my life is already half over. And in that moment death evolves from a biological curiosity into an existential reality - a power which begins to control our thinking, planning and living.

William Stringfellow speaks very bluntly and clearly about the power of death: "A man begins to die when he is born. Death accompanies him in every event and experience in this world; it constantly overshadows all that a man says and does; and it is the final outcome of his labor. Though a man amass graat wealth or many possessions they will neither protect him from death nor themselves be free of death. Though a man make himself an amiable reputation by his thought or words or deeds, the memory of him dies as certainly as he himself does." [Free in obedience p. 63-64]

And again - "Except for God's own intervention in this history in Christ, it is t the power of death which reigns in the world, in all things, at all times, whether recognized or not by men or nations." [Ibid p.69]

Death is a power - a reality that enslaves us - a fear which, like a parasite, extracts the joy and meaning from any and every human experience.

But what if the power of death has been defeated? What if there is a greater reality - the reality of life? What if God himself has intervened in this dismal progression in a way so simple, so magnificiently decisive that death literally, no longer has dominion over us? What if, in Stringfellow's words it is possible "to live in this life, in the very midst of death's works, safe and free from death?" [Ibid p.72]

If that were true we would have in our possession the very best news of all. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is precisely that the "what if" has happened. That, intellectually, is the Good News, as Paul struggled with it. In Christ Jesus we will live - in him we can live - now.

Personally - it can mean a New Humanity - a new life; a transforming power that changes a succession of days leading inexorably toward death into a glorious freedom - freedom to live without fear; freedom to live because death no longer has dominion.

Let us accept that: let us celebrate our new humanity - let us grasp what has been given to us. Amen.

Prescription for the "Blahs"
Romans 3: 21-26
October 26, 1969 - Reformation Sunday
John M. Buchanan

One of the more creative television commercials is the one promoting a tablet, which when dropped into a glass of water, becomes a very potent antidote for several common, bodily afflictions. It is even effective against an exotic, recently discovered affliction called the "Blahs". Now I have no formal training in Medical Science and so I am unable to reveal the clinical description of the "Blahs". But as I understand it, it is part physiological and part psychological. Very slippery to diagnose, yet we all know when we have it: and it is highly contagious. If you have the "blahs" very long, your husband or wife inevitably will contract it from you and here I speak with some experience. In the final analysis the "blahs" resembles intense emotional fatigue which is expressed in physical tiredness, inertia. And though the magic tablet may help, the most commonly practiced home remedy is to stare at a blank wall - or a television screen, which is euphemism for an electronic blank wall, and lots of sleep.

We have the "blahs". Just as certainly as this is Sunday morning the American People are in the middle of a "blah" epidemic. You and I have it. We feel it in each other: we keep contaminating each other with it. We are as tired emotionally and physically as any people ever were: and we're doing a monumental amount of wall staring. Particularly in the Church. Now with that improbable introduction, and with the promise that we're going to look a little more deeply into the causes of our ailment, allow me to direct your attention to the fact that this is Reformation Sunday. The two are related - our having the "blahs", and this being Reformation Sunday. But it's going to take me a little time to describe how.

To understand the significance of the Protestant Reformation we have to get inside the minds of two men - St. Paul, and Martin Luther - neither one of which appears ever to have had the "blahs", by the way.

Paul was the first Christian to reflect philosophically on the meaning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as it confronted a particular culture and a particular religion. That is, Paul, was the first Christian Theologian. But he was also a Jew, and a good one, and he embodied in himself the conflict of Gospel and Jewish culture. Paul was part of a culture obsessed with religion - and the concept he chose to symbolize this obsession was the law. For Paul "law" meant really two things.

First, the Law was the collection of Mosaic and Deuteronomic statutes which along with the collected historic interpretations, made up the Torah. The religious law dominated the life of the faithful Jew. It told him what to eat and when: it told him when to worship and how: it regulated his relationships with friends, foes and livestock in his field.

But Paul meant more than this objective reality - this behavioral code - when he used the word "law". Law, for him indicated a mentality - a way of being religious, an approach to life based on the assumption that whatever men needed from God - love, blessing, grace, righteousness, forgiveness, salvation - was available to them if they pulled the proper levers, by living the right kind of life.

It was this phenomenon that Paul meant when he talked about the Law. God and man are separated - and the way reconcilation is effected - the way the two are brought together is by man being religious, observing the customs, demonstrating piety, repeating the proper prayers. Religion - summarized and symbolized by the word "law" was man's bridge to the Almighty.

Paul saw that this law - and the religiosity in which it is expressed, quickly becomes an end, in and of itself. It's thrust is inward - it focuses on the self and the self's quest for righteousness. And because it is so totally self-centered it gives birth to a whole system of institutions and offices the sole function of which is to perpetuate the same religiosity.

It is in this kind of context then that the Gospel, as Paul understood it, ran head on into religion and culture - which for the Jew were one and the same thing. The Gospel is the very good news that men are justified by faith. Today's English Version provided the best rendering of that passage I've ever read: "God's grace is a gift, and it is free - no strings attached. It is just there, to be grasped by all who will believe: because that's the kind of God he is.

hippies and intellectuals we once could call radicals for opposing the war has become a new coalition of businessmen and insurance agents and housewives, one million strong, and they are telling us that this war will never end, until we make it end.

We have to cope with the prospect of a Red China, now a nuclear power - soon able to drop those bonbs on New York and Chicago: and for twenty years our goverenment has been telling us that that too will go away if we just ignore it long enough; but it hasn't.

We have to cope with a spiralling inflation that has effected everyone here. Our campuses are noted now for their violence level. Students subsidized by our money tell us we've created machines that service the establishment, "elite concentration camps", instead of institutions of higher education. In our cities blacks and whites confront each other with violent rhetoric and violent behavior. People move out, the tax rate soars, municipal services decline. The air is full of dirt and strontium 90. The streams are polluted with industrial waste. Drugs are in - people talk about marijuana in about the same way they used to talk about women smoking. Everybody's buying a gun.

On and on it goes, and the news media pumps it to us twenty four hours a day. We are the first generation of men ever to know what was happening to them while it happens. And it all gives us a monumental case of the "blahs". Life is truly tough - and we're very tired thinking about it all.

And we go to church on Sunday morning to that traditional respite from life's concerns to be comforted and salved and spiritually massaged; to hear that everything's really O.K. if we keep obeying the right rules. And more often than not we get more of the same. We're made to feel guilty for our foriegn policy, responsible for poverty among us and told to pay reparrations to people we always thought were pretty nice as long as they stayed in their places.

And if we didn't have the "blahs" before that will do it. We feel worse at 12:00 than we did at 11:00. So we retreat - to the back yard, the T.V., patio or den - to those last havens of rest and refreshment. We have the "blahs" so badly, nothing will get us out. We want only to be left alone. It's really a widespread phenomenon. Community organizations of all types are suffering today - because people are tired - emotionally and physically. Life is getting to be a bit too much.

It's happening here at Bethany Presbyterian Church. We have the "blahs": the apathy is thick - at our meetings - our planning sessions - even our worship. We must assume, whenever we plan a program, that no matter what it is - no matter who is involved or how good its content, the vast majority of church members just aren't going to be interested. No one is quitting in opposition to policy - everyone knows they should come to church. It's simply a whole lot easier tostay at home.

The church today is under severe attach today - by those who say it is doing too much, and by those who say it isn't doing enough. Some are predicting that the church will never make it to the 21st century. I don't believe that. But should that dire prediction come true - it will not be because of attack from within or without. We will have died of the "blahs".

It's never been easy to be a Christian. St. Paul was ultimately a martyr. On this Reformation Sunday we remember the soul-rendering agony, the courage and stamina of Martin Luther. It's never been easy - but I believe it is quite possible that it has never been this hard either. The temptation to withdraw - to succumb to the "blahs" is probably greater today than ever.

Please don't. In the name of Jesus Christ let us live in this world - let us confront its problems - let us embrace our salvation and then go out and do something in His name. Amen.

In times past your Spirit has picked up tired and weary men and sent them into the world on fire. Our Father, we pray for that renewing, recreating life giving Spirit. Amen.

Saints Sinners and the Gates of Hell
Matthew 16:13-20
November 9, 1969
John M. Buchanan

Robert McAfee Brown, one of the more articulate Presbyterian theologians, offers his readers a small quiz in his book The Bible Speaks to You. The quiz is a series of six statments (p. 190) to which the respondent answers "yes" or "no".

1. There is a God.....
2. God is concerned about man.....
3. God is creator, judge and redeemer.....
4. God is revealed in Jesus Christ .....
5. God demands obedience.....
6. One who believes these things must be active in the Church.....

Brown suggests that most people would respond with an unqualified "yes" to the first five statements, but at item #6 the protests would begin.

In another book, Beliefs That Matter, Ganse Little, past moderator of the General Assembly and pastor of a large California congregation, notes that every year he asks the members of his Junior High Communicants Class whether it is necessary for a follower of Jesus Christ to be a member of a church, and every year a great number of them answer "no". [p. 91]

Nothing in my experience puts me in the same league with Robert McAfee Brown and Ganse Little - except that I have personally encountered the truth of their assertions time and time again. In the popular mind being a Christian and belonging to the Church are just not related. That popular mind exists outside the church, but not exclusively, for I discover an astonishing number of church members who vehemently defend a Christian's right to belong or not to belong, depending on his own whimsy. The Church, that is to say, is altogether optional.

And yet, Sunday after Sunday, you and I stand up and confess our faith; and one of the things we confess is our belief in the Church. We believe in God the Father Almight, and in Jesus Christ, his Son, our Lord, we believe in the

on the rock of faith like Peter's - even though he said nothing that resembles that either. I would suggest that we allow the text to stand, as it is. Peter, in fact, was the leading light in the early Church before Paul. He was the spokesman: he was a rock. The important thing about the sequence is, in my mind, the fact that a confession of faith in Jesus Christ is tied directly to the existence of and membership in the Church - and the related fact of what happened immediately afterward.

Peter was a momentary saint. But he was also a sinner. Jesus went on to tell how he must suffer and die. And Peter, the one who had seen the identity of Jesus, the one who had the courage to voice his conviction, the one on whom the Church would be built, proceeded to demonstrate that he really hadn't understood what it was all about. "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." But suffering and death? "God forbid, Lord. This shall never happen to you." This time around Jesus' response to Peter was a little different: "Get behind me Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not on the side of God but of man." It's quite a demotion. One minute blessed, strong, a rock of faith: the next minute Satan, bungling, insensitive, shallow. Yet it is still Peter upon whom Jesus will build a Church: a saint - and a sinner - but the gates of hell will not prevail against that Church.

Much has been made of the suggestion that Jesus didn't intend to establish a Church at all. And one line of New Testament Scholarship attributes this entire portion of the book of Matthew to a later insert. In fact, the Greek word for church, Ekklesia, appears only three times in the Gospel narrative, all three in Matthew and two times in this text. It is true, with this one exception, there is very little in the words of Jesus specifically talking about a church. But that statement must be understood in the context of our Lord's Jewishness - and in the context of the fact that he had gathered around him a small community of people clearly assigned to carry on the work of teaching, preaching, healing and worshipping. That is to say, Jesus didn't spend much time talking about a community that already existed.

The Church has its faults. Any apologia for institutional Christianity that didn't acknowledge that fact would be guilty of gross error. The history of Christianity is not always pretty. The Church has been involved in the Crusades - the Spanish Inquisition: the Church in our century nodded in approval at Hitler and Mussolini: the Church in our nation blessed slavery and war. And today the Church sometimes seems like the last bastion of total unconcern with the issues of human dignity and social justice. But, let us remember that Peter was both saint and sinner: so - we are all. Let us remember too - in response to the anti-institution movement - that ideas need forms; that no idea exists for long without a structure. To be sure - the institution may be slow and cumbersome - it may be 20 years behind the pace of cultural change. But - and again I use the words of Erni Campbell: "A motorcycle may execute a U turn quicker than a trailer truck, but in the long run it's the truck that delivers the goods". [The Protestant Hour, Plain Words for Troubled Times p. 33ff]

Of course the ledger has two sides, and I think in our anxiety to be honest about the Church we forget that fact. The Church in the Middle Ages may have been hopelessly corrupt, but it was also soley responsible for keeping alive the arts and letters that would finally bring an end to the Dark Ages. The Church may have blessed slavery: but it was also the Church which first called slavery for what it is - and it is still the institutional church that is literally giving its life and blood for the restitution of that historical iniquity. The Church may have turned its head while Hitler came to power: but it was also the Church that went underground in Germany - and today in China - rather than submit to totalitarianism of any kind. The Church may spend inordinate amounts of dollars on its own self-enhancement: but a UNESCO survey serveral years ago pointed out that well over 80% of the health and education services in the whole continent of Africa were either carried out or started by the Christian Church. The Church may be insensitive to human need but it has been said that the British Labor movmment owes far more to John Wesley than it does to Karl Marx; and it is a fact that the movement in England

of what it ought to be: at what it does in light of what Christ calls it to do. But I believe in the Church - because ultimately it is not mine, nor yours, nor the Presbyterians' nor Methodists' - but Jesus Christ's. It is his - and it will not fail. And because of that it is worth our belief - our devotion - our very lives.

Amen.

Our Father, we don't often think in these terms - but we are grateful for your Church through the ages. We are grateful to be a part of your holy people. And although we stumble and fall - we would serve you with complete devotion. Be with your Church - be with us - as we seek to be your faithful and obedient people: through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Surprised by God
Genesis 21: 1-7
November 16, 1969
John M. Buchanan

The phrase "joyless Christianity" is a contradiction in terms. It makes no sense at all. And yet, I would suggest that, this is precisely what we have on our hands. Religion sans joy. I keep returning to this theme - but I do so because it keeps coming up in my perception of the Church - and particularly the Church as I work in and through it in this place.

There is, I would propose, about our religion too much theorizing and too little feeling: too much talking and too little experiencing: too much discussing and too little acting. For the life of me I can not recall ever feeling joyful - or experiencing deep happiness as the result of a discussion group. Theories are ideas: and ideas which remain locked in the mind soon die there. That is our problem: the Gospel of Jesus Christ withers - and dies in the recesses of our minds: and we possess a religion without joy.

This is not, in any way, to say that religion is only an emotional - feeling - type of experience. It is not, in any way, to disparage the honest intellectual quest of a seeking mind. Far from it. That extreme too bogs down in its own blind alley. In this complex age - in this complex society we need to be thinking deeply about the meaning of our faith: we need to know what is going on in the world, and how that, whatever it is, relates to our faith. We must be theologians, everyone of us. Our problem lies in the fact that for many of us this is all there is.

It all began with the Enlightenment that period in history which followed the Dark Ages. For a thousand years the human intellect was the captive of a barbarian and ignorant mentality. Men lived their lives on the basis of superstition. Man's progress, intellectually, culturally, technically and socially came to a rude halt - and remained static for a millenium. Then the Enlightenment - the Renaissance - art flourished, philosophy was reborn, symphonies were composed and books written. The movement then began which gave birth to the industrial

Genesis, and focusing finally on one of the stories I've known since childhood - the Birth of Issac. But this time - a phrase jumped out of the text: a phrase I really hadn't known was there - a perfectly beautiful and utterly profound phrase - spoken by an old woman who had just borne her first child. Sarah said "God has made laughter for me."

Now before we deal with the subtle impact of that statement, which by the way has stuck in my mind all week long, let us here and now acknowledge that we have a lot of trouble with the whole Old Testament. There is nothing very rational, after all, about talking snakes, axe heads that float, dry bones that dance and a sun that stands still. Things like that don't happen - and when we discover that they don't we encounter our first Old Testament crisis. Perhaps none of it is true - perhaps nothing really happened the way it is told. Many of us, I would suggest, never get over that crisis. We live with it by filing all those Sunday School stories on a shelf in our minds reserved for "Jack and the Bean Stock" and "Snow White". And by refusing to deal with the depth of the crisis, by stalling our motors in the discovery that the Old Testament is not an encyclopedia of historic and anthropologic facts we very conveniently manage to ignore the real issue with which the Old Testament confronts us.

That issue is that there is a God - one God who is totally free. A God who created and continues to create. A God who choses people to do certain things and then gets imtimately involved in their lives. A God who discloses himself in history - big history like a political power struggle between the Babylonian and Persian Empires: and little histories - like the life story of an unremarkable woman by the name of Sarah.

That is, the Old Testament insists that God is really God; not a captive, domestic God who operates in very understandable ways - but a God who is free - and who keeps interjecting himself into the common life of men. We don't, you see, really want to buy that - and therein is our problem.

When they looked back on their own history, for instance to their miraculous

There is a God: a God who is free to act in ways as surprising as the creation of the cosmos and the birth of a child.

Christians, then, are people who perceive things differently. Christians are people who are always alert to the fact that God is - and that he is very much involved in the life of the world, and with their individual lives. Christians are people who know that secret, and who - because they perceive the power and presence of God are living more and experiencing more - and crying more - but always laughing more. Life is full of grace: life has been infiltrated by God: the life of nations and the life of men. None of it is excluded: there is no place - no situation outside the realm of God's redeeming power: God is involved in life with us - when we are shooting at each other and when we are loving each other: when we are having babies and when we are dying.

William Stringfellow has, I believe, said it best: "....the most notorious, plain and victorious truth of God is that God participates in our history - even yours and mine. Our history - all our anxieties - have become the scene of his presence and the matter of His care. We are safe. We are free. Wherever we turn we shall discover that God is already there. Therefore, wherever it be, fear not, be thankful, rejoice and boast of God." [A Private and Public Faith p. 72]

Where you and I are grasped by that truth we are suddenly able to look into our own histories and see the power and presence of God, opening a door here - closing one there: creating a new possibility here - bringing meaning and growth there. That done we begin to see him now - moving us, urging us, holding us up when we stumble, creating us over and over. We begin, that is to say, to come to grips with a God of surprises.

Another woman bore a child, and was surprised, for her motherhood was even more unlikely than Sarah's. In a manner of speaking she laughed too; so did her kinswoman, Elizabeth and the baby in her womb. The biggest surprise of all is that God did come among us: the ancient Israelites were right - He's that kind

Christmas Means "I'm OK - You're OK"
Romans 5: 1-8: Ephesians 2:8-10
December 14, 1969
John M. Buchanan

As I prepared this sermon it became increasingly apparent that it needed a story to introduce it. The story ought to be real, immediate, but most of all it ought to relate in a very personal way to the experience of those who would hear it. I thought of several incidents in my own experience that did the job beautifully for myself, but they were extremely personal, and probably would lose their impact in the retelling. And so I'm going to ask you to help me get this sermon off the ground by thinking of your very own introductory illustration.

Here are the ground rules. Think of a situation in your own past when you were guilty of hurting someone you loved, a wife or husband, your children, your parents, a dear friend. Recall how lousy you felt about it - your anxiety, your fear of the inevitable confrontation, your suspicion that some irreparable harm may have been done to the relationship of love. And then recall that when the confrontation occurred you discovered that you were forgiven, the other you hurt still accepted you, love was not destroyed. ~~My guess is that everyone here can play back a number of situations such as this.~~ It's an amazing experience - almost unbelievable. It's exhilarating to be free of guilt - to be free of the anxiety and the feeling that somehow we've got to make amends. It's a beautiful experience to know that we are accepted in spite of ourselves: that we are forgiven even before we say "I'm sorry", that we are loved just as we are.

Now, if my suppositions are correct, everyone here has an illustration - perhaps a whole list; and allow me now to tell you what you have an illustration of. The word is "Grace", an idea which is essential to an understanding of the Gospel; an idea, when misunderstood, turns Christianity into something totally alien to the New Testament. ~~Life is full of it: in every life it keeps happening: in small, inconspicuous ways everyone has known the profound goodness of undeserved love.~~

~~The idea of Grace, God's grace to be precise, is the heart of the Gospel.~~ of Jesus Christ. ~~It~~ "Grace" is what is "good" about the good news. ~~It is central even to a rudimentary understanding of Christianity.~~ It is a profoundly simple concept - so simple, in fact, that it is difficult to explain and even more difficult to believe.

and expositor of grace. Time and time again he wrote to the early Christians that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the good news that God's love is a gift, a free gift that cannot be earned or deserved. Men used to be under the law - that is, they lived with the assumption that God's acceptance of them could be earned by unflagging adherence to the rules and regulations which constituted the religious law. No more, said Paul. You are now in a state of grace. God loves you apart from anything you have done: you are free from the law, and the anxiety of continually attempting to prove yourself. You are free to live joyful lives in response to that. Having faith, for Paul, was what a man did in response to God's undeserved love - and it was a radically and gloriously new approach to the whole question of man's relationship with his creator.

The Church of Jesus Christ exists to proclaim and celebrate the good news. Our worship is not an undefined reach toward the heavens by men searching for God, but the response of a group of very happy people who know they are loved. Every week - the Gospel is announced. The new Book of Common Worship prescribes a general Confession ↑ Every week we confess our sin, and at the end of that → which exercise the good news is proclaimed: "God shows his love for us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us..... If a man is in Christ, he is a new creation: the old has passed away, behold, the new has come."..... In the name of Jesus Christ, we are forgiven." Nothing "iffy" or conditional about that. Regardless of what else happens in worship - or in the sermon - the good news of God's grace is here announced and celebrated. And the happiest moment of our worship ought to be as we respond - " O Lord, open thou our lips

And our mouths shall show forth thy praise.

Praise ye the Lord.

The Lord's name be praised.....Glory be to the Father, and

to the Son and to the Holy Ghost."

And why? Because the very essence of our being in corporate worship here is all tied up in that little liturgical exercise, to be reminded of and to celebrate God's grace - God's love - God's forgiveness.

Thus far we have been thinking in terms that might be called "very basic Theology". And there comes a time in every theological discourse when we must ask

unless he perceives "I'm O.K.",

noises, bright light, cold air and rough handling. We know that unless someone makes physical contact with that baby, unless he is stroked and fondled, there is a good possibility he will die.

After one year of life the new person has received all the data he needs to conclude - "I'm not OK - you (the parents) are OK" He has learned to walk alone, that is he's not carried and therefore not fondled enough, he's continually smelling bad, and knowing he should stumbling and falling, and now being hit for crawling out of his crib - or knocking over vases. Something is radically wrong - "I'm not at all OK - but those other people must be."

Harris proposes that that data is recorded permanently, carried into childhood and adulthood; and that many people, perhaps most of us live out our lives ~~trying to~~ hung-up in this insecure child ego-state trying be OK- to earn the love and acceptance of others.

Reuel Howe, another man who has worked extensively in the area of religion and psychology notes that "Anyone who works with people knows how common it is for men and women to have predominantly disparaging feelings toward themselves. They cannot believe in themselves, or that other men or even God accept them.: [p. 104 Man's Need and God's Action] Seabury Press, Greenwich, Conn. 1958

Howe, and others, have said that this need for love and acceptance is the deepest yearning in the human heart - the deepest need we have. And they have said, unequivocally, that this need is largely unmet for most of us.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ ought to be the answer. The Gospel of grace and love and forgiveness. That's a "preacher" statement if there ever was one. But Thomas Harris, the psychiatrist, is the one who said it. "The central message of Christ's ministry was the concept of grace.....The concept of grace.....is a theological way of saying 'I'm OK - you 're OK. It is not you can be OK, if, - or - you will be accepted, ~~unconditionally." [p. 227]~~ check this if. It is - you are accepted -unconditionally." [p 227]

The child must know that he is loved, unconditionally, The child must experience grace, even when he crawls out of the crib, dirties his pants and breaks the best vase. ~~And~~ Somehwere along the line you and I must know that we are loved, accepted, forgiven - not on the basis of what good lives we've lead - but unconditionally.

If we are to be healthy persons, we must know that we are "O.K", and that we don't have to burn ourselves out trying to earn that.

Is There Any Hope?
I Peter 1:3-9
December 21, 1969
John M. Buchanan

Chrsitmas Day dawned. To my joy I saw brilliant blue skies overhead. Already we had one welcome gift, that of glorious weather.

I looked down the hut. It was hardly recognizable. The ground was clean and neatly swept. The bamboo bed slats had been taken out and thoroughly debugged. The walls above the sleeping platforms were garlanded with green boughs - the one note of Christmas cheer the jungle offered in abundance. Men stirred, got up, and began to move about, wishing each other a hearty "Merry Christmas."

For once we ate our breakfast in leisurely, gentlemanly fashion. Then we prepared for church. We wore whatever was our best, although it may have been no more than a clean loincloth.

I went early to church. I wanted to have a few moments of quiet. Someone had made a Christmas wreath of jungle greens. Resting against the ivory-colored bamboo of the Holy Table, it gave a feeling of serenity.

Others had also come for those moments of hallowed quiet. Men entered softly. By fifteen minutes before eleven o'clock, when the service was to begin, the church was full. Some were sitting on the ground, some on bamboo benches, some on home-made stools. But most were standing along the sides and at the back or front, whichever one might like to call it. Over two thousand P.O.W.'s filled the area. But the hush I had felt when I first arrived remained unbroken.

Padre Webb entered and took his place in front of the Holy Table. He prayed in silence, raised his head and announced the first hymn, "O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant, O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem." He did not need to say the words and have us repeat them after him. Those who knew them sang them; those who did not picked them up from their neighbor.

Bill Maclean was standing beside me. He was singing bass and in Latin. We had been at St. Andrews University together. While we sang, there came to my mind the going-down service before our last Christmas at home, which students

I remarked to Bill, "This is a Merry Christmas - especially when you compare it to last year."

"Last year!" He made a face. "That was a muddy mess. No holiday, no church service, hardly any food. If I remember correctly, you couldn't eat anything anyway."

"Right. I was on a diet of nothing. That was just before I got 'dip' and a few other things. It was almost the end."

Bill looked more serious. "We're not out of the woods yet - not by a long way. But now there's hope. That's the thing - there's hope."

That was a section from a book I am sure many of you have read: Through the Valley of the Kwai by Ernest Gordon. Gordon is now Dean of the Chapel at Princeton University. During the Second World War he was a captain in the Scottish Infantry, a prisoner of war after the British collapse in the Far East, and one of the survivors of the Japanese Death Camp made famous by the motion picture, "The Bridge Over the River Kwai."

The book he wrote is a remarkable story of the miraculous transformation that occurred in a group of men who had accepted the fact that for them there was no hope. In the P.O.W. camp British gentlemen became animals. Concern for the welfare of others was non-existent. Men stole food from each other: men slowly dying of malnutrition, diptheria and amoebic dysentery were simply ignored and left to die alone. Civilization, as these men had known it, simply came apart, because there was no hope at all. The death rate soared, and because there was no realistic expectation that life in the immediate future would have any significance - in fact, that there would be a future - men lost whatever it is that distinguishes them from animals.

The theological premise on which Gordon's very fine novel is built, is that Hope is an absolute necessity for the survival of human life. That's an important premise - a relevant idea as we reflect on the meaning of Christmas in this year 1969.

moving out to meet the future, the precise contents of which we can never really know in advance.

And on what basis does one have this hope? Christmas - the coming of Jesus Christ into the world - the living hope of a God who participates in this life with us. That is the shattering goodness of the Gospel. Not just because a baby was born 2,000 years ago, but because the birth of that child signaled the incredibly good news that Almighty God cares about us in this life: that he participates in this life with us: that we, whoever we are, wherever we are, can face our futures hopefully because God will be in them with us.

That makes quite a bit of difference as we face the perplexing days ahead. In Vietnam, in our cities - in the halls of Congress - in the United Nations - on our campuses - have we any reason to believe that the God who invaded the world by way of a rude manger bed will not be there too? He is there - and will be there because of that we may have hope.

It makes quite a bit of difference to us personally, as well. Everyone of us faces an uncertain future. Everyone of us carries a load of problems, concerns, simple things really - but mo umentally significant in the way they influence our daily attitude - our relationships with those we love - our style of life. Well, the incredible hope of Christmas is that God is a partner with me in my life, and with you in yours: that he is going to accompany you and me as we walk into that uncertain future: that his redemptive, creative love is going to be a factor, a power, at work in whatever the future might bring.

That's not starry-eyed naievete -: nor is it a cynical fatalism: that is Hope, grounded in an openness to reality - a confidence that in Jesus Christ we may welcome a thousand tomorrows - because God is with us.

Is thereany Hope? I would rather sing my response -

"Good Christian men, rejoice,
With heart and soul, and voice;
Give ye heed to what we say:
News! News! Jesus Christ is born today." Amen